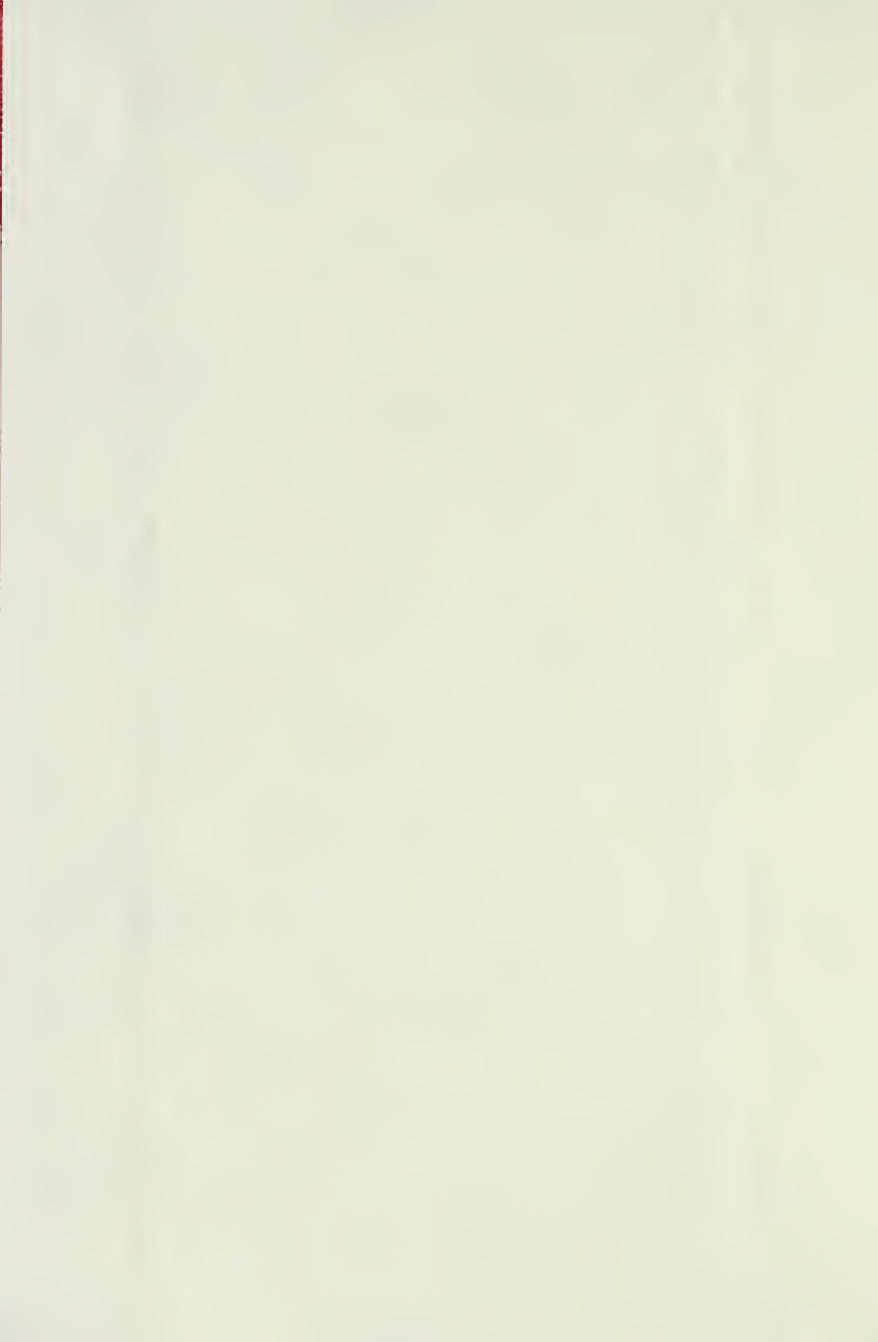
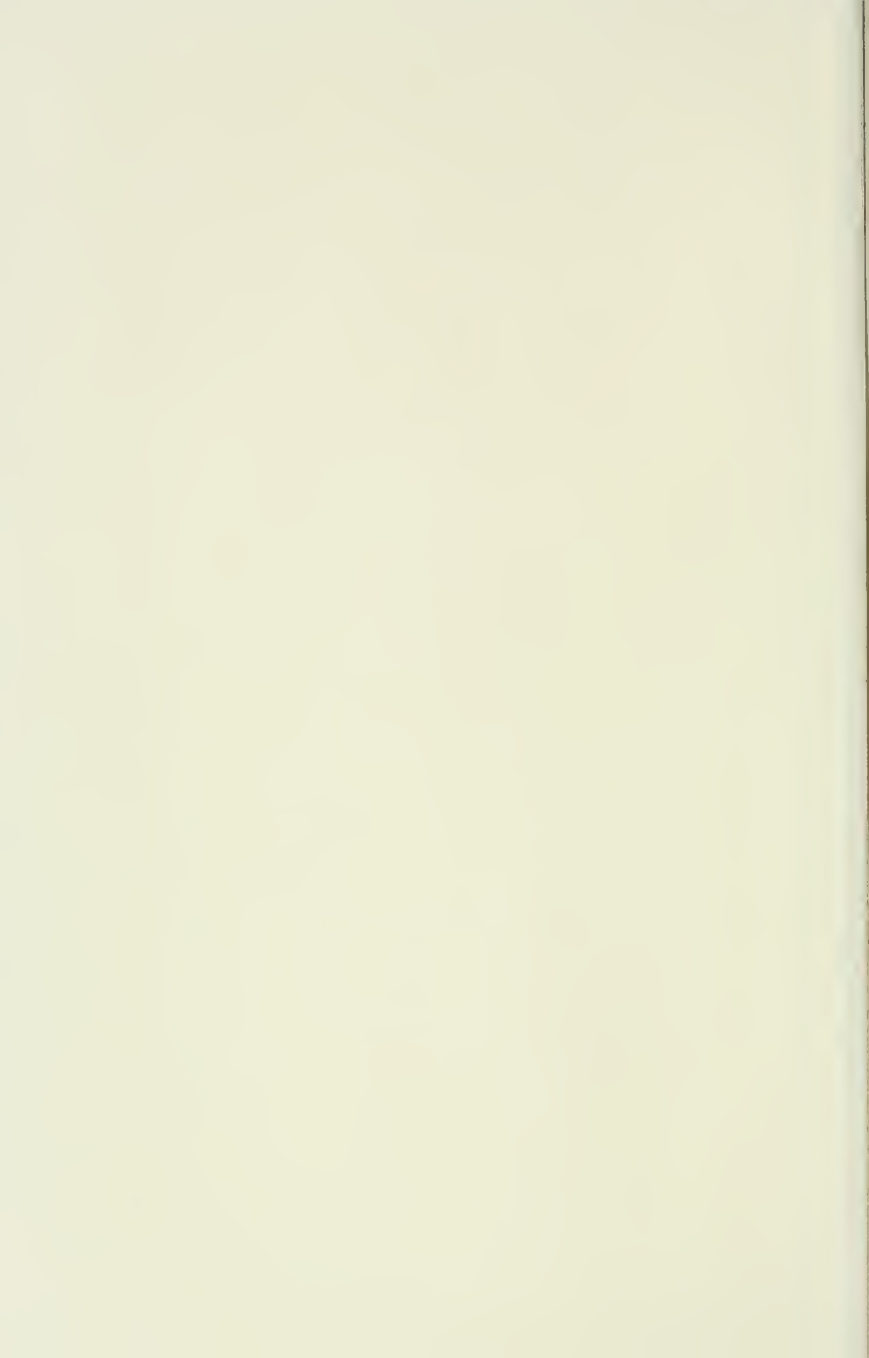


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G. P. Burdett
Salisbury.

TO THE BITTER END

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TO THE BITTER END

BY

M. E. BRADDON

*Author of "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "VIXEN,"
"LONDON PRIDE," ETC.*



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CONTENTS.

324A.	2203
I. "DOWN IN A FLOWERY VALE"	1
II. BRIERWOOD IS DEGRADED	6
III. "O, DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME I MET YOU"	17
IV. "THE TRUE TITIAN COLOUR"	23
V. MR. WALGRAVE INDULGES HIS SOCIAL INSTINCTS	35
VI. GRACE DISCOVERS A LIKENESS	42
VII. "IF IT COULD ALWAYS BE TO-DAY!"	47
VIII. "RECAL HER TEARS, TO THEE AT PARTING GIVEN"	53
IX. "A FOND KISS, AND THEN WE SEVER"	62
X. MR. WALGRAVE IS SATISFIED WITH HIMSELF	69
XI. ON DUTY.	74
XII. HARCROSS AND VALLORY	80
XIII. "THE SHOWS OF THINGS ARE BETTER THAN THEMSELVES"	86
XIV. MR. WALGRAVE RELIEVES HIS MIND	94
XV. "DOST THOU LOOK BACK ON WHAT HATH BEEN!"	105
XVI. "BUT IF THOU MEAN'ST NOT WELL"	114
XVII. BEYOND HIS REACH	122
XVIII. MR. WALGRAVE IS TRANSLATED	129
XIX. RICHARD REDMAYNE'S RETURN	135
XX. "WHAT IS IT THAT YOU WOULD IMPART TO ME?"	150
XXI. A COLD AND LOVELESS UNION	165
XXII. A PALPABLE HIT	174
XXIII. "FOR LIFE, FOR DEATH"	185
XXIV. GEORGIE'S SETTLEMENT	190
XXV. MRS. HARCROSS AT HOME	193
XXVI. MR. AND MRS. HARCROSS BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER	207
XXVII. "MORE FELL THAN ANGUISH, HUNGER, OR THE SEA"	220
XXVIII. "BUT O, THE HEAVY CHANGE NOW THOU ART GONE!"	225
XXIX. A RECOVERED TREASURE	230
XXX. "LOOK BACK! A THOUGHT WHICH BORDERS ON DESPAIR"	235

CHAP.	PAGE
XXXI. HUSBANDS AND WIVES	240
XXXII. "ON PLEASURE BENT"	252
XXXIII. "AND ONE WITH YOU I COULD NOT BE"	256
XXXIV. "BUT DEAD THAT OTHER WAY"	267
XXXV. "THINK YOU, I AM NO STRONGER THAN MY SEX!"	275
XXXVI. "A NATIVE SKILL HER SIMPLE ROBES EXPRESS'D"	281
XXXVII. "THEN FELL UPON THE HOUSE A SUDDEN GLOOM"	288
XXXVIII. "OF ALL MEN ELSE I HAVE AVOIDED THEE"	293
XXXIX. "THOU ART THE MAN"	304
XL. "AND THERE NEVER WAS MOONLIGHT SO SWEET AS THIS"	317
XLI. "DO EVIL DEEDS THUS QUICKLY COME TO END"	325
XLII. THE WRONG MAN	331
XLIII. "YES BROTHER, CURSE WITH ME THAT BALEFUL HOUR"	339
XLIV. "SOME INNOCENTS 'SCAPE NOT THE THUNDERBOLT"	347
XLV. "BY THE SAME MADNESS STILL MADE BLIND"	352
XLVI. "HOME THEY BROUGHT HER WARRIOR DEAD"	362
XLVII. "WHY BANISH TRUTH? IT INJURES NOT THE DEAD"	367
XLVIII. "AND WHEN HE FALLS, HE FALLS LIKE LUCIFER"	372

CHAPTER I.

"DOWN IN A FLOWERY VALE."

AN old-fashioned garden deep in the heart of rural Kent; a garden such as no modern gardener would approve, but sweet-scented and beauteous withal, and very dear to its possessor, who is far away across the barren sea, trying to mend his fortunes in Australian gold-fields, and who looks back with many a secret sigh to that one green valley in England which he calls home. It has been his home forty years, and the home of his race for centuries past. Very hard would it be to part with the old place now; and yet Richard Redmayne has had to look that bitter possibility steadily in the face.

There are no trim flower-beds, circular and diamond-shaped no marvels of ribbon bordering, no masses of uniform colour, no curious specimens of the pickling-cabbage tribe, or varieties of the endive family; but two long wide borders filled with a medley of old-fashioned flowers, a great wealth of roses, a broad expanse of grass, with trees here and there; ancient apple and pear trees, a couple of walnuts, a Spanish chestnut—low and wide-spreading, making a tent of shade—and one great gloomy cedar. The garden is shut in from the outer world, from the quiet country-road which skirts it, by high red-brick walls lined with fruit trees, and crowned with dragon's-mouth and stone-crop; walls which are in themselves a study for the pencil of a pre-Raphaelite. And beyond the garden—parted from it only by a sweetbrier hedge—there is a wide Kentish orchard, where the deep soft grass is flecked with the tremulous shadows of waving leaves—the sweetest resting-place—a very haven of peace on sultry summer afternoons. And at the end of the orchard there is a pond, where a brood of ducks plash in and out among the water-

lilies; and on the other side of the pond the pastures and corn-fields of Brierwood Farm.

Garden and orchard, homestead and farmyard, belong to Richard Redmayne, who has been bitten with the gold-hunting mania, and is away in Australia, trying to retrieve fortunes that have suffered severely of late years by a succession of unlucky accidents, bad harvests, disastrous speculations in live stock, cattle disease, potato blight,—all the shocks to which agricultural flesh is heir.

He leaves his younger brother behind him—an easy-going, rather weak-minded man, who has never done much for himself in life, but has been for the most part a hanger-on and dependent upon the master of Brierwood—and his brother's wife, by no means easy-going or weak-minded, but a trifle shrewish and sharp-spoken, yet not a bad kind of person at heart. These two, James Redmayne and his wife Hannah, are left in charge of the farm.

And of something infinitely more precious than Brierwood Farm. Dear as every acre of the old home is to the heart of the wanderer, he leaves behind him something ten thousand times dearer—his daughter Grace, an only child, a tall, slim, auburn-haired girl of nineteen.

She was by no means a striking beauty, this farmer's daughter, who had been educated beyond her station, the little world of Kingsbury in general, and Mrs. James Redmayne in particular, protested. She was not a woman to take mankind by storm under any circumstances, but fair and lovable notwithstanding; a figure very pleasant to watch flitting about house or garden, tall and slender like the lilies in the long borders, and with a flower-like grace that made her seem akin to them—a sweet, fair young face, framed in reddish-brown hair, with touches of red gold here and there among the waving tresses; a face whose chiefest charm was its complexion, a milk-white skin, with only the faintest blush-rose bloom to warm it into life.

Grace Redmayne had been over-educated—so said Mrs. James, who would have liked to see her niece a proficient in the dairy, and great in the management of poultry. In sober truth, the girl's life was somewhat useless, and Mrs. James had common sense on her side. About the real business of the farm Grace knew nothing. She loved the old home fondly, delighted in wandering among the flowers, and idling away long mornings in the orchard; loved all the live creatures around her, from old Molly the dairymaid, whom she had known from her earliest childhood, to the yellow ducklings hatched yesterday; “and there an end.” She had spent three years in a boarding-school at Tunbridge Wells, and had returned to Brierwood with the usual smattering: playing the piano a little, speaking French a

little, knowing a few stray phrases of Italian, sketching a little, painting impossible flowers upon Bristol-board, and with an insatiable passion for novel-reading.

Her father picked up a piano for her, second-hand, at a broker's shop in Tunbridge; a piano chosen for its external graces rather than its internal merits, but which looked very grand in a recess in the old-fashioned wainscoted parlour. The farmer dearly loved to have his daughter sing to him in the summer twilight before supper, and loved the soft low voice no less if it sometimes lulled him into unpremeditated slumber, from which a sharp clatter in the adjacent kitchen, and the voice of Mrs. James, asking shrilly if they meant ever to come to their suppers, were wont to rouse him, recalling him too suddenly from pleasant dreamland to the hard world of fact.

She was his only child, this fair-faced auburn-haired Grace; a beautified resemblance of the one only woman he had ever loved, his pure, simple-hearted, country-bred wife, untimely reft from him by an appallingly-sudden death twelve years ago. She was the only thing he had upon earth to love and cherish, and he had poured out all the treasures of a strong man's affection upon that fair young head. It was a bitter trial to leave her in the bloom of her girlhood; but after a long struggle with adverse circumstances, he had arrived at the conviction that there was nothing else to be done. An old friend of his—a man who had failed ignominiously as a small tenant-farmer—had been doing wonders in the gold-fields, and had sent Richard Redmayne a glowing account of his successes. Redmayne was by nature adventurous and speculative; not a man to plod on day by day contentedly upon a level road, even if that road were moderately prosperous; and for a long time adversity had been his yoke-fellow. He brooded over that letter from Australia, written carelessly enough—with considerable exaggeration perhaps—brooded over it as if it had been the magical clue to high fortune. Night after night he dreamed of being away yonder, knee-deep in the rough clay, turning up spadefuls of yellow gold under a broad white moon. Morning after morning he stared at the painted walls of his bed-chamber, bright in the glory of the summer sunshine, with a pang of disappointment, to think his life was shut in by their narrow bounds. True, there was his daughter, whom he loved better than anything else in the world; but the thought of her only made him more eager to seek his fortune far afield. Unless he did something—something as desperate as this—and succeeded, Brierwood must needs be sold to strangers. He was up to his eyes in debt, and could hardly hope to hold out much longer.

Perhaps none but a desperate man, and a man inexperienced in the ways of the world beyond his own homestead, would ever

have thought of such a thing as gold-digging as a means of redemption. But this wild hope of his had been lurking in his mind since the first days of the gold fever, when men's hopes and dreams of fortunes to be picked up on that unexplored Tom Tiddler's ground were wilder and larger than they are now. From the daily worries and ever-increasing perplexities of his life, Richard Redmayne set his face towards that unknown world across the sea, until it seemed to him as if a star was shining over there which he had but to follow.

Even if he failed, he told himself, it would be some kind of satisfaction to have done something. Any failure that could befall him would be better than to stay at home staring misfortune in the face. He called his creditors together, and told them the plain facts of the case. They had not yet grown desperate, and had a great faith in his honesty. Indeed, the sums he owed were not large—scarcely amounting altogether to fifteen hundred pounds, whereas the farm was good value for four thousand—but seemed large to him in his utter inability to pay them without encumbering his land.

His creditors smiled ever so little when he explained his gold-digging views, did their best to dissuade him from so mad an adventure, but readily granted him time, which was all he wanted.

"I'm not afraid," he said, when one of them, a friend of many years' standing, tried to put his scheme in the gloomiest light. "There's something tells me I must succeed if I only hold on. It may be one year, or two, or three, before I do what I want to do. It shan't be more than three. But I ask for three years' grace from all of you, in case of the worst. I don't expect to get so much indulgence for nothing. I'll give you all an annual five per cent. upon your bills."

That was liberal-minded and fair on Mr. Redmayne's part, the creditors said. One weak-minded man wanted to waive the question of interest, but was put down by his brother trader. Mr. Redmayne had taken a very just view of the case, and they wished him all possible success in his new career. After all, people were finding gold in large amounts; and there was no reason why he should not have his share of the luck that seemed so common. Perhaps there was nothing heard of the unlucky diggers—they perished mute and inglorious; so that it seemed as if a man needed only a pickaxe and spade to turn up wealth unlimited.

By much brooding and dreaming, and by reason of an ever-growing weariness, which made him turn with loathing from the farm, where everything seemed to go badly, Rick Redmayne, as his friends called him, had brought himself to this state of mind. Out yonder was the certainty of fortune, had he but the courage

to go and seize upon it. He was active and hardy, had never known a day's illness, was as strong as Hercules, a good marksman, the very man to rough it in a new country. From the petty difficulties and annoyances of his existence here he turned with a yearning to the unknown life over there. So one fine March morning, after that friendly interview with his creditors, he went up to London, bought his outfit—a very economic and simple one—took his passage in a vessel then loading in the Docks, and to sail in a week, saw his sea-chest safely shipped, and went back to Brierwood to tell his daughter Grace.

The scene between these two was a bitter one. The girl loved her father passionately. What else had she ever had to love with all the strength of her nature, which was a warm and loving one? Until this moment he had given her no hint of his intention. She had heard him talk with a touch of envy of the fine doings in Australia, and of his friend Joe Morgan's luck; had heard him compare the slow plodding toil and trouble of a farmer's life with the sudden turns of Fortune's wheel which raised a man from penury to wealth in a week; but that was all. She had listened, and sympathised with him and comforted him, never dreaming that it could enter into his head to leave Brierwood. The thing seemed impossible. She stood stricken speechless when he told her his intention, looking at him with an agonised face that smote him to the heart.

"You don't mean it, father," she cried, "you don't mean it! You're only saying it to frighten me."

"Nay, my lassie, I do mean it," he said tenderly, taking her in his arms, and gently smoothing the pretty auburn hair as her head lay upon his breast. "But you mustn't grieve about it like this. My going away is for your good, Gracey. I might have to sell Brierwood, if I stopped at home and twiddled my thumbs while things went to ruin. There's nothing I can do about the farm that Jim can't do just as well. It's only for a year or so I'm to be away—three years at the longest."

"Three years!" cried the girl piteously. "O, father, father, take me with you!"

"Take you to the gold-fields? No, my pretty bird; that's too rough a life for such as you. I didn't bring you up like a lady, and send you to boarding-school, to take you among such a rough lot as I must work with out yonder."

"I don't care how rough the life may be; I don't care what hardships I may have to bear. I shall be safe anywhere with you."

"Safe anywhere with you." The words came back to his memory years afterwards, and smote him like a perpetual reproach.

He tried to comfort her; tried to put his exile in a cheerful

Eight. The girl would think of nothing but the unknown sea he had to cross, the unknown land in which he had to toil.

"My heart will break if you go, father," she said, and steadfastly refused to be comforted. Yet he went, and her heart was not quite broken. It was a great sorrow. Night after night she cried herself to sleep in her pretty room under the old red-tiled roof; morning after morning she woke to a sense of desolation and misery. But she was hardly eighteen years of age. Little by little hope revived. A cheery letter, telling of the wanderer's safe arrival, was the first comfort that brought a smile to the fair young face; and from that grew the habit of looking forward to other letters. Her heart was not broken—that was to come afterwards.

CHAPTER II.

SRIERWOOD IS DEGRADED.

MR. and Mrs. James Redmayne had two sons; great hulking unkempt youths of nineteen and twenty, illiterate to a degree that inspired their cousin Grace with a profound contempt for them, but hard-working lads, and excellent farmers. These young men, with their father, had now the entire management of the land, and handled it after their own pleasure. Things about the farm seemed to mend somehow after the master's departure. Richard Redmayne had been impatient, speculative, fickle-minded; had been always trying new experiments of late; had squandered money upon agricultural machinery, a great deal of which he had been obliged to cast aside as worthless after a few months' trial. James was of a more plodding and cautious character, had an eye for ever open to the saving of sixpences; and in less than twelve months from the date of Richard Redmayne's leave-taking, the farm had in a manner righted itself, and was beginning to pay. There were no profits to boast of; but the family lived, paid ready-money for everything, and there were no losses. It was altogether an improved state of things.

"If father had only stayed at home!" sighed Grace, when her uncle talked of these improving prospects.

"If father had only stayed at home," echoed Mrs. James in her shrill voice, "things never would have improved. He'd have always contrived to be in a muddle with his new-fangled notions, never having patience to wait for matters to mend slowly; working one day as if the devil was driving him, and sitting with his arms folded the next, growling over his troubles. He's a deal better where he is than here. There may be something to be

gamed out yonder by working in spurts; but it isn't the way to get on here."

At which Grace flared up, and defended her father hotly. She loved him, and he was perfect. In turning his back upon Brierwood, and going away to seek a fortune, he had made a sacrifice worthy the heroes of Roman history, she thought, with a very distinct memory of Marcus Curtius, who stood out from the dim background of classic story as a particularly interesting young person, whose autograph she would like to have added to her modest collection of such treasures. Her thoughts followed him fondly by day and night at this period of her life; the time came—ah, too soon—when they went with another. Her dreams showed him to her toiling under that distant sky; her prayers were breathed for him. Could she stand by and hear him undervalued?

Mrs. James took her rebuke very meekly.

"The girl's right to stand up for her father," she said, "and I mean no harm against Richard. I only mean, that he's got too strong a will and too fiery a temper for this sort of work. He's better suited to knocking about in foreign parts, than to waiting patiently while his corn grows and his store-cattle fatten."

It was early in June, Richard Redmayne had been away fifteen months, and the roses were beginning to bloom in the garden at Brierwood. The exile thought of them sometimes, in the midst of his noisy camp life, and fancied himself sitting under the great cedar where he had smoked many a pipe and drank many a cup of tea, served by his daughter's hand, in the warm summer afternoons of old. Haymaking was at hand, and Mrs. James up to her eyes in the weary task of preparing huge meat pies and gooseberry turnovers for the haymakers, who would devour the contents of her larder—let her fill it never so full—like a swarm of locusts. It was the sweet early summer time, in short, when spring, like an overgrown girl, has just developed into summer's fair womanhood, when Mrs. James, like a faithful steward, ever on the watch to increase the store she held in charge for her brother-in-law, descried a new manner of adding to her income.

Within three miles of Brierwood Farm there was a fine old house, buried in the midst of a vast neglected park, called Clevedon—a spacious Tudor mansion, which had been preserved almost in its integrity from the days of the famous Harry, but which of late had been sorely neglected, like the park and chase that surrounded it.

Sir Francis Clevedon, the present owner, was, in fact, too poor to inhabit this domain, and lived abroad, calmly awaiting some stroke of fortune—such as a long-looked-for demise of an ancient aunt from whom he had expectations—that might enable him to

inhabit the home of his ancestors. It was indeed by no sin of his own that this young man was an exile. His father, Sir Lucas, had been one of the shining lights of the fashionable world in the days of the Regency, and had squandered a handsome fortune, gambling with Fox, and drinking with Sheridan; had lived hard, and married late in life, carrying his young wife into exile with him, and allowing his children to grow up aliens from their fatherland.

He had spent all his money, and mortgaged Clevedon, but happily had not gone so far as to cut off the entail and alienate the estate for ever. So, when gout in the stomach carried off Sir Lucas, his son Francis, then a lad of fifteen, inherited a barren title, and a heavily-encumbered estate, and was content to live in tolerably comfortable lodgings in the outskirts of Paris with his mother and sister, while a hard-headed steward administered the estate, and did his best to reduce the mortgages by means of the incoming rents.

So long as Sir Lucas lived, there was little hope of clearing the estate. To the last he retained the extravagant habits which had made him seem reckless even amongst the wild set he had consorted with—drinking château Margaux, and eating strawberries in February, and peaches in April; tossing a handful of silver to a cabman; and insisting on a stall at a couple of operahouses and the Vaudeville, as simple necessities of existence; betting a little every spring at Longchamps, and speculating on the red and black a little every autumn at Baden or Hombourg: while his anxious wife strove to save sixpences and shillings by giving her children cotton gloves instead of kid, or deleting a pudding from their frugal dinner.

When Sir Lucas died, things brightened, in the estimation of Mr. Wort, the steward, who now began to cherish hopes that Clevedon might clear itself in due time. The young baronet and his mother and sister were so easily satisfied—declared themselves willing to live upon anything that could be spared out of the annual income; and a year after Sir Lucas's death migrated from Paris to Bruges, where the necessities of life were cheaper.

For five-and-twenty years Clevedon had been in the custody of servants. The entire staff consisted of a superannuated butler and his wife, two active young women,—one for the house, and one for the dairy,—and a broken-down gardener, who kept one particular flower-garden which had belonged to his mistress, Sir Lucas Clevedon's mother, when he was a boy, in perfect order, and allowed the rest of the gardens to become a howling wilderness. The dairy produce was sold, and the profits arising from the home-farm alone, carefully administered, amounted to a yearly income which Lady Clevedon informed Mr. Wort was ample for herself and her two children.

About a year after the baronet's death, Mr. Wort advised a great clearing of timber—(so long as Sir Lucas lived, he had declared there was not a stick worth cutting)—and by this means raised between five and six thousand pounds, which helped to lighten the load wherewith the estate was encumbered. Altogether the prospect was hopeful, and the mother and son, pacing the quiet boulevards of Bruges, talked cheerfully of the time when they should be at home at Clevedon. They always called it home, though neither of them had ever slept under the old gothic roof. The mother was never destined to behold the realisation of those pleasant fancies; she died a few years after Sir Lucas; and Sir Francis wandered farther afield, leaving his sister at school at a convent in Bruges.

Of course the house might have been let during all these years, and another source of income created. But here pride had intervened. Sir Lucas could stand anything but that, he said—anything but strangers established in the house in which he had been born, and in which he had entertained the Prince Regent during one brilliant fortnight of ruinous hospitality. To traffic in the home of his ancestors—to barter the domestic hearth of all the Clevedons for the ill gotten money of some City magnate! The letter in which Mr. Wort proposed such an arrangement, almost caused Sir Lucas a fit of apoplexy. He foamed and raged for a week at what he called “that fellow’s insolence.” After his death his widow and his son respected this prejudice, and never dreamt of seeking a tenant for their ancestral halls; so Clevedon remained in the care of the servants, and went slowly to decay, the damp coming in here, and the rats devouring the wainscot there, and gradual ruin creeping stealthily from cellar to garret, and from garret to cellar.

John Wort, the steward, had a friendly acquaintance with the Redmaynes. He lived in a neat little red-brick house of his own, square and ugly, but comfortable withal, on the village green—Kingsbury village—a mile and a half from Brierwood, and was always glad to drop in at the farm, for an evening pipe and a comfortable supper, or a cup of tea under the spreading cedar branches, where it pleased Grace’s fancy to set her tea-table sometimes on balmy midsummer afternoons, or in sultry harvest-time. They all liked him, although to strangers he would scarcely have seemed a fascinating person. He was something over sixty years of age; a tall man with an honest rugged face tanned and reddened by exposure to all kinds of weather, gray hair which was stiff and short like stubble, and bushy gray whiskers. He had neither wife nor children of his own, and was very fond of Grace, who treated him in a dangerously bewitching manner—half impertinent, half affectionate.

It was through Mr. Wort’s agency that aunt Hannah hit

upon a new means of increasing her income. The steward dropped in one June afternoon as they were taking tea under the cedar, Grace with a novel in her lap, the two hulking cousins devouring cold boiled bacon and broad beans with the air of not having eaten for a week or so; much to the disgust of Miss Redmayne, who would have liked the tea-table to look pretty, with nothing more substantial upon it than a dish of strawberries and a bowl of flowers, and a china plate of thin bread-and-butter, like the "parlour" bread-and-butter at Miss Toulmin's. Miss Toulmin was the mistress of the Tunbridge Wells' seminary in which Grace Redmayne had acquired her only notions of polite life. The girl had learned that knowledge of good and evil which is so freely communicated in such establishments, and thought it rather a hard thing to be a farmer's daughter—still harder to be aunt Hannah's niece; aunt Hannah, who was so painfully industrious, and had a disposition to tuck-up her sleeves on the smallest provocation, displaying sharp red elbows, and who took an active part in the weekly wash, nor scrupled to admit and even boast of the fact. Altogether Grace Redmayne was a little at war with her surroundings, especially now that the one figure she loved was removed from the narrow home circle. Roughing it in Australia would have seemed to her a very pleasant thing, compared with the small mortifications and aggravations of her daily life—to hear the click-clack of her aunt's shrill tongue all day long, to be obliged to wear cotton gowns in the afternoon, and to be nagged at because she was not fond of housework. There had been lawyers' daughters and doctors' daughters at Miss Toulmin's—damsels for whom life was to be a very genteel business—who came back from their holidays with glowing accounts of parties and picnics, croquet and dancing. Poor Grace had never been to a party in her life, and could not play croquet all by herself, though the wide level grass would have made a splendid croquet ground. There were her cousins, it is true—good-natured lads, who would willingly have given her any spare hour they could snatch from their industrious lives—but the cousinly hands and boots were of the clumsiest, and jarred upon Grace's notion of the fitness of things. It seemed to her that a croquet mallet should never be handled by any one less refined than the curate of Kingsbury—a slim pale-faced young man, with a weak voice, who was in great request among the small gentry of the neighbourhood, and who made a ceremonious call about twice a year at Brierwood, bringing the odour of gentility with him.

Grace put down her novel, and poured out a great breakfast-cup full of tea for the steward. She was always glad to see him. He brought them news of the outer world, and that interesting exile, Sir Francis Clevedon, of whom she delighted to

near. She had a girlish notion that he must be like Edgar Ravenswood—superb and gloomy and uncivil.

"Any news from Australia?" asked Mr. Wort. "There was a mail in the day before yesterday, I see."

Grace shook her head mournfully; no—there was no letter this time.

"The last was a long one," she said, "and father told us not to expect a letter every mail. We should be sure to hear if anything went wrong with him, he said. His friend Mr. Morgan would write."

"Ay, to be sure; that's a comfort for you—he's not all alone out yonder."

After which the steward sipped his tea meditatively, while Grace watched him, wondering whether he would tell them anything about that interesting exile, Sir Francis Clevedon.

"We shall have a rare hay harvest this year, Jim," he said, presently; at which James Redmayne lighted up a little in his feeble way, and said, "Yes; barring any heavy rain for the next two days and nights, they were certain of a good crop."

"There's not much chance of rain; my barometer hasn't been below thirty this fortnight. We haven't had as good a crop at Clevedon for the last ten years as we've got now."

"And that'll help Sir Francis, I suppose," said Grace, eagerly.

"Of course it will, Gracey," returned Mr. Wort, cheerily. "There'll be a good seven hundred pounds to pay the mortgages out of hay this year. It's a pleasure working for Sir Francis. He hasn't taken more than two hundred and fifty a year out of the estate since his father died. Another cup of tea, if you please, and not quite so much sugar."

"Any chance of Sir Francis coming home soon, Mr. Wort?" the girl asked, as she poured out the tea.

"Not much; unless his aunt, Mrs. Calvert, were to go off the hooks suddenly, and leave him her money. He's pretty sure to get it when she does go, I believe; but she seems inclined to stick to it as long as she can."

"She's very rich, isn't she?" Grace asked, not so much for information as with the desire to keep up the conversation. She had heard all about Mrs. Calvert a great many times, but she was never tired of hearing anything that concerned the Clevedon family. They were the only great people she knew of, and in her mind represented all the chivalry and splendour of the earth.

"Rich! well, yes; she's worth six to seven thousand a year, I fancy; just about enough to keep Clevedon up in a quiet way. Sir Lucas spent forty thousand a year; but times are changed since then, and a country gentleman can live simply.

Mrs. Calvert was Sir Lucas's sister, you know, and a great beauty in her day. She used to ride to hounds, canvass for Sir Lucas at elections, and set the whole country talking about her one way and another. She had some first-rate offers, I've heard, but gave herself no end of airs, and didn't marry until she was five-and-thirty; and then took up with a yellow-faced old chap, who had made all his money in the East Indies. They never had any children, and Mrs. Calvert's bound to leave everything to her nephew. She was ten years older than Sir Lucas, and must be going on for eighty by this time."

"I do hope she'll die soon," cried Grace; "at least, I didn't mean to say anything so wicked as that. But I shall be so pleased when Sir Francis and his sister come to their own home. It does seem such a pity to see the dear old place going to rack and ruin."

"The land's not going to rack and ruin, anyhow," said the steward.

"No, of course not, you dear, clever Mr. Wort. You take care of that, and I think you count every blade of grass and every ear of corn. But it's the house, I mean. The tapestry and the panelling, and the cabinets and beautiful things that you showed me one day, all smelling so damp and mouldy. What a splendid place it must have been when George IV. stayed there!"

"Yes, it was fine enough then," said the steward with a sigh. "There was over a hundred pounds spent on wax candles alone, in that fortnight—I've seen the tallow-chandler's bill—and a hundred and fifty more for lighting the conservatories and gardens with Chinese lanterns the night Sir Lucas gave a feet-shampeter. The Prince and Sir Lucas, and two or three more, used to sit up playing cards and drinking curaçoa till four or five in the morning—hours after the country visitors had gone home. It was a fine time."

"That was before Sir Francis was born, wasn't it?" inquired Grace.

"Before Sir Lucas married," replied Mr. Wort. "He didn't marry till he'd spent all his money, and then fell in love with the vicar's daughter, Miss Agnes Wilder, a girl of eighteen. I daresay some people thought it was a fine match for her, and perhaps even Mr. Wilder himself was taken in. Anyhow, there was no one to oppose the marriage; and I suppose Miss Wilder was fond of him. He was a fine-looking handsome man even then, though he was getting on for fifty. So they were married one morning in Kingsbury Church, and went off to Paris for their honeymoon, and never came back again. Sir Lucas couldn't show his face in England."

"Poor lady, she has had a hard time of it!" said Grace.

sentimentally disposed towards every member of the Clevedon family.

"She has indeed, Gracey, and has been a good wife to a rare bad husband. She was a proud young lady too, I've heard. Mr. Wilder came of a good old family, and brought his children up with very high notions."

The two young men, Jack and Charley Redmayne, had been ploughing through their beans and bacon all this time, indifferent to a conversation the gist of which was very familiar to them. The steward was fond of talking about his employers, and people were apt to listen to him, merely out of civility. It was not every one who was always interested in the old story like Grace. Uncle James had closed his eyes in placid slumber, tanned by soft summer winds, that came creeping under the cedar branches. Aunt Hannah had drawn a gray woollen stocking from her pocket, by way of a light piece of fancy-work which might be taken up before a visitor and was darning industriously.

"You don't happen to know of any one hereabouts who lets lodgings—comfortable lodgings, that would suit a gentleman—do you, Mrs. James?" Mr. Wort asked presently.

Mrs. James pondered, and then shook her head.

"There's none that I know of, except in Kingsbury," she said. "Mrs. Freeman's in the street, and Mrs. Peter's on the green near you."

"Neither of 'em would do," replied the steward; "much too small; I've looked at them both. I want a place that would do for a gentleman who's coming down for a month or two's fishing. I want a decent-sized sitting-room, and a large airy bedroom, well-cooked meals, and a good garden. If you knew any farmhouse within half-a-dozen miles or so where they'd be inclined to take him——"

"I don't," said Mrs. James; and then, after a pause and a dubious glance at her slumbering husband, she added, "I don't see why we shouldn't take him ourselves, if it comes to that. There's Richard's room empty, and the best parlour not used once in a month. He'd pay pretty well, I suppose?"

"He'd pay a fair price—a liberal price even—for such accommodation as you could give him, I'm sure."

"Take a lodger!" exclaimed Grace aghast. "Aunt Hannah!"

"Take a lodger!" echoed the matron; "and why not, pray child? Why shouldn't we turn empty rooms to account? There's need enough for us to earn all the money we can, while your father's away toiling and moiling to pay his debts. I should have thought you'd be glad to help him in any small way you could."

"Of course I should, aunt; but I don't think father would like us to let lodgings."

The poor little twopenny-halfpenny boarding-school pride was aroused. What would Miss Toulmin and all Miss Toulmin's young ladies say, if they discovered this stigma on their sometime companion? Grace had been invited to a little breaking-up party six months before, and went over to the Wells sometimes to call upon her late mistress, and still measured existence by the Toulmin standard.

"He's a gentleman," said Mr. Wort, "or ought to be, for he's got good blood in his veins."

Grace looked a little less disgusted at this. She had a great notion of the superiority of people of noble or ancient race—an idea that they were another order of beings than the common flesh-and-blood creatures with whom her daily life was spent.

"I don't think father would like it," she said, and made no farther protest.

"When your father went away, he gave me the full management of everything in the house and dairy," replied her aunt. "I leave everything to you, Mrs. Jim," he said; "let Gracey read her books, and play her piano, and enjoy her life. I'm sure she won't want to interfere with you in the housekeeping." Those were his words the last morning, and you heard them, Grace."

"I know," answered Grace; "but I'm positive father never thought we should turn Brierwood into a lodging-house."

Mr. Wort was sorry to have displeased his favourite. She was sitting with her face half turned away from him, the red lips pouting with a discontented expression.

"If Grace doesn't like it," he said, "let the matter drop."

"I'm ashamed of your pride and nonsense, Grace," cried Mrs. James. The girl's opposition made her more intent upon carrying out her notion. "I should have thought you'd have jumped at the chance of saving a few pounds for your father. Whatever the gentleman paid for the lodgings would be clear profit; and of course there'd be some profit on his board, and obliging your friend Mr. Wort into the bargain."

"Very well, let him come," said Grace; "there's nothing I wouldn't do to help father."

"You needn't go a-nigh him," said Mrs. James, whose lord and master had now awakened, and was regarding her with a stare of perplexity. "Sarah will wait upon him, and I shall cook for him; gentlemen are particular about their table. Perhaps you'd like to have a look at Richard's room, Mr. Wort?"

James Redmayne was fairly aroused by this time, and the matter was explained to him in a glib eager way by his wife,

a manner that told him it would be well for his domestic peace not to attempt any opposition to her scheme.

After this they went off to survey Richard Redmayne's room, Grace even deigning to accompany them. Once having resigned herself to the fact of the lodger, she could not help being just a little interested in the business. In such an eventless life as hers, the advent of a stranger made an epoch. The time came only too soon when she learnt to date everything from Mr. Walgrave's coming.

Hubert Walgrave—that was the name of the stranger—a barrister, Mr. Wort told them, hard-working, and with a tolerably good practice already. He had some means of his own, and was well-born, yet stood almost alone in the world, having no near relations. He had overworked himself, and been seriously ill, and now was ordered off to some quiet country place, where he might have pure air and seclusion, for an enforced rest of two or three months.

"It goes against the grain with him to be idle," said Mr. Wort; "but the doctors tell him, if he doesn't strike work, he's likely to go into a decline; so he submits, and writes to ask me to find him a place hereabouts."

"Does he know this part of the country?"

"Well, yes and no. He's been down here for a day, at odd times, to look about him, that's all."

"You've known him a long time, I suppose?" asked Mrs. James.

Of course it was necessary to be very sure about the respectability of their lodger.

"Only since he was five years old," replied Mr. Wort, with a thoughtful smile.

"That's enough. I know you wouldn't recommend any one that wasn't steady."

"O, he's steady enough!" answered the steward—"almost too steady for a young man, I sometimes fancy. You won't catch *him* tripping. He's an out-and-out contrast to—to—the young men of my time."

Richard Redmayne's bed-chamber was a great airy room, with three windows on one side looking over the garden, and an extra window at the end commanding a turn of the high-road: a very pleasant room, furnished with old mahogany chests of drawers and bureaux, and a quaintly-carved four-post bedstead; dimity curtains to bedstead and windows; narrow strips of faded Brussels carpet here and there, a big clumsy painted washstand with plain white crockery, a couple of samplers framed and glazed, a worsted-work representation of Jacob's dream, four gaily-coloured prints of stage-coaches and hunting-scenes for the ornamentation of the walls, an old

Indian teapot and half-a-dozen cracked cups and saucers on the high chimney-piece, and an all-pervading perfume of dried lavender:—a room in which a man might live or die peacefully.

Mr. Wort glanced round the chamber, and pronounced that it would do.

"I'll tell him to bring his shower-bath," he said. "You can give him plenty of cold water, I suppose?"

"O yes!" Mrs. James answered rather snappishly. "He can have water enough, if he's one of your slopping and sluicing gentlemen."

Mrs. James regarded all unnecessary use of water, except in scrubbing deal-boards, with distaste, as involving waste of labour in carryings to and fro, and perpetual slopping of stairs and passages.

"You know the best parlour," she said.

Mr. Wort was perfectly familiar with that state apartment, which was only occupied on rare occasions, and kept religiously under lock and key, as a temple sacred from the tread of common feet. A long low room with a great bow-window, massive oaken beams across the ceiling, faded chintz coverings to chairs and sofa—such a sofa! a small detachment of infantry might have reposed upon it, if repose could be found on anything so hard; a ponderous square mahogany table; an old sideboard, embellished with brass lions' heads, with rings through the noses thereof; three cracked china jars of pot-pourri; the family Bible and Izaak Walton in whole calf; a carpet from which every vestige of bright colour had faded half a century or so, but which was still piously protected by a drab linen cover of spotless purity;—a cool, darksome chamber, the bow-window half shrouded by roses and honeysuckle—a room in which a man might dream away the summer hours, or muse beside the winter fire, oblivious that life was moving on.

"The best parlour will do admirably," said Mr. Wort. "And now, how about terms? Should you consider, say, three guineas a week a fair remuneration for board and lodging?"

"Yes," replied aunt Hannah, who was thinking that two guineas out of the three might be clear profit. "That will satisfy me, if it will satisfy James."

This allusion to James was a mere polite fiction—a wisely compliment. All the world of Kingsbury knew how very small a voice James Redmayne had in the management of affairs at Brierwood.

"Then it's all settled, I conclude," said Mr. Wort; "and Mr Walgrave may come as soon as he pleases."

"Yes," replied aunt Hannah; "the rooms are ready. I'm not one to let dirt settle in corners all the year round, and then

make a great to-do over a spring cleaning, and call that good housekeeping, as some folks do. Every Friday scour, and every Tuesday sweep: that's my maxim. It leaves Monday for washing, and Wednesday for ironing, Thursday for baking, and Saturday for clearing up."

"Lor, aunt Hannah," cried Grace, with a little impatient shrug, "as if Mr. Wort cared about all that!"

"There's some people might care about it to their own profit, if Mr. Wort doesn't," replied the matron sharply. "Farmers' daughters are as idle as duchesses nowadays, or worse; for duchesses ain't brought up at twopenny-halfpenny boarding-schools."

"It's the best school at the Wells," Grace flashed out indignantly. "Father wouldn't have sent me to a bad one."

It was the outrage against her father she felt most keenly.

Mr. Wort flung himself into the breach gallantly.

"I shall write to Mr. Walgrave to-night," he said; "and I daresay you'll have him down on Saturday."

"Saturday or Monday's all alike to me," replied Mrs. James.

They strolled back to the garden, where the tea-tray had given place to a square black bottle of hollands, a brown jug of cold spring water, and a couple of tumblers. Grace was thoughtful. It was a humiliation to receive a lodger; but she could not help wondering and speculating a little about the stranger. Strangers were so rare at Kingsbury; and to receive one in her own house was like the beginning of a new life. They would date after-events from this epoch, no doubt, and divide life at Brierwood into two periods, before Mr. Walgrave came; after Mr. Walgrave came.

CHAPTER III.

"O, DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME I MET YOU?"

HE came late on Saturday afternoon—a calm sunny afternoon, with scarcely breeze enough to stir the newly-blown roses. The place seemed all roses to Hubert Walgrave's haggard London-weary eyes: roses making a curtain for the porch; roses white and red climbing up to the very chimney-pots, entangled with creamy yellow woodbine; spreading bushes of moss-roses and cabbage-roses in the narrow garden between the high-road and the house; and through a side gate Mr. Walgrave caught a glimpse of the old-fashioned garden behind the house, all ablloom with roses.

"Rather a nice place," he murmured, in a languid semi-

supercilious tone that was almost habitual to him. "As a rule, farmhouses are ugly."

All the household—they had just finished tea in the everyday parlour—heard the stoppage of the fly; and there was a little group behind the dimity curtains peering out at the newcomer—a group in which Grace was by no means the least curious. She forgot all the degradation involved in the idea of a lodger for the moment in her eagerness to see what he was like.

Jack and Charley Redmayne had gone out, at their mother's bidding, to assist in bringing in the stranger's luggage—a huge trunk, time-worn and shabby, which from its weight seemed to contain books; a large leathern portmanteau, also the worse for wear; a carpet bag or two, three or four fishing-rods, and a shower-bath.

"Ah," exclaimed Mrs. James, with unmitigated disgust, "I expected he'd be a slopper!"

"He looks like a gentleman," said Grace, thoughtfully. Heaven knows where the girl had obtained her notion of a gentleman; unless it were from the rector, a fussy little elderly man, who was always quarrelling with some one or other of his parishioners; or the curate, an overgrown youth of two-and-twenty, who had bony knees and wrists and ankles, and looked as if he had not yet ceased from growing out of his garments.

"He looks like a gentleman," repeated Grace dreamily. And indeed Mr Walgrave bore upon him that stamp of gentle blood, that unmistakable, indescribable grace and air which the merest peasant recognises intuitively as something that makes that other clay different from his own. He was tall, but not too tall—slender, but not too slender. His face was just a little worn and faded from recent illness, and could have hardly been considered handsome; dark brown hair growing rather sparsely on the brow; a sallow complexion, of an almost foreign darkness; gray eyes, that looked black; an aquiline nose; a sarcastic mouth—a mouth capable of much expression; capable also of expressing nothing, if its owner were so minded. His age might be perhaps about five-and-thirty. Grace thought him elderly. Any little gleam of romance which her fancy picture of him might have inspired, vanished at sight of the reality.

"But he looks like a gentleman," she said for the third time, as she opened her work-basket, and took out some scrap of that useless fancy-work which Mrs. James's soul abhorred, and seated herself at the window looking into the back garden. The common parlour had a window at each end, and a half-glass door besides opening into the garden.

There was a little stir in the house presently—a clattering of plates and dishes, a bell rung once or twice, the shrill voice of

Mrs. James directing the maid-of-all-work. A dinner had been prepared for the new-comer, and was at this moment being served in the best parlour.

Grace crept to the half-open door of the family sitting-room, and peeped out. The door of the opposite parlour was ajar, and she heard a polite languid voice, which had an unpleasant coldness, she thought, approving everything.

"Thanks. The rooms are very nice—quite airy and comfortable—all that I wish. Yes; I will take a glass of your home-brewed ale to-day, if you please. I have ordered a hamper of wine to be sent down from London. It will arrive to-night, I daresay." And then, after an interval: "I have to thank you for receiving me as a lodger. Mr. Wort tells me it is the first time you have admitted anybody to your house in that capacity."

"Well, you see, sir," blurted out Mrs. James, who was candour itself, "my brother-in-law's circumstances—Brierwood belongs to my husband's brother, Richard Redmayne, who's away in Australia at those rubbishing diggings, where I can't make out that he's ever earned a blessed sixpence yet, and has left us in charge, as you may say—his circumstances, you see, are not what they was; and so I didn't feel myself justified in refusing a profit, if it was only a pound a week; though my niece Grace, who's been brought up at boarding-school, where they put all kinds of stuck-up nonsense into a girl's head and call it education—our Grace was dead against it."

"Dead against me?" said the stranger, in that slow lazy tone of his, as if he were speaking of something utterly remote from his own life and all its interests. "I hope before I leave Brierwood Miss Redmayne may discover that I am not such a very objectionable person."

"Lord bless you, sir! it wasn't you she objected to; it was only the notion of a lodger. She'd have made the same fuss if it had been the Archbishop of Canterbury."

Grace blushed crimson during this talk about herself. She was angry with her aunt for talking of her; angry with the stranger for his supercilious tone, as if she had been something so very far beneath him.

The stranger made his own little fancy picture of the farmer's daughter—a blowsy fat-faced young woman, with red cheeks, and perhaps freckles, dressed like a caricature of London fashion.

"She plays the piano, I suppose—your niece?" he said languidly, when he had declined the raspberry-tart and cream which Mrs. James pressed upon him. He imagined with a shudder the agonies he might have to endure from a piano-thumping damsel of agricultural extraction. "Why do not our legislators give this feminine *canaille* their rights?" he inquired

of himself. "This Brierwood niece would be following the plough, or supervising the hay-makers, in that case."

"Yes, sir," replied aunt Hannah, whose sharp treble sounded sharper than usual after the legato tones of the stranger; "she do play. Richard had her taught all the extras. She has rather a pretty taste for music—so far as such a poor judge as me can say. But if you find it unpleasant, Mr. Walgrý"—Mrs. James insisted on calling the lodger by this corruption of his surname—"you've only to say the word, and the piano shall not be opened while you're with us."

"Not for worlds, my dear Mrs. Redmayne. Let the young lady play as much as she likes, and forget the obscure fact of my existence. I mean to be with you too long to admit of any such sacrifice as a suppression of her musical inclinations. I hope to stay here for a considerable time off and on, you know—going backwards and forwards to London as soon as I am a little stronger. I am a hard-working man, and cannot afford to be long out of harness."

Mrs. James glanced towards the huge trunk, which stood open just where it had been deposited near the parlour door, with a heap of bulky volumes, in dilapidated calf or battered sheepskin, thrown pell-mell upon the floor beside it.

"It looks as if you didn't mean to be idle here, sir," she said, in her simple soul regarding books as the hardest kind of hard labour.

"No," Mr. Walgrave answered, with something like a sigh; "a barrister must get through a good deal of tough reading if he wishes to succeed in the world; and I don't mind owning that I do hold worldly success as a prize worth working for."

He was expanding a little—had already dropped something of his habitual languor. Grace liked him better after what he had said about her music. She went softly back to her seat, and resumed her work, ashamed of herself for having listened.

After dinner, at which he had eaten sparingly, and with the air of a man who cared very little what he ate or drank, Mr. Walgrave lighted his cigar, and sauntered out into the garden. The sun had set by this time; but a faint glow of rosy light still lingered above the western wall; and above that the sky was of a tender green, that melted into the soft summer evening gray, with here and there a patch of brighter hue, like the flecks of colour in an opal. Hubert Walgrave walked slowly along the grass, looking about him with a lazy sensuous enjoyment of the scene and the atmosphere.

"Upon my word, it is simply perfect in its way," he said to himself. "Old Wort did not exaggerate the beauty of the place. Every angle of that old house has its peculiar charm; every rood of this garden a grace that makes it delightful. And

yet it's hard to imagine a man living here year after year, away from all the contest and expectation of life, content that this summer's harvest should yield him as good a crop as last summer's; that next year's profit should be only a little less, or a little greater; content to watch nature's slow processes repeat themselves from month to month—eggs hatching, wool growing, cattle fattening, corn ripening; to live a life in which there is no margin for hope. No; I can't conceive the feelings of that man. I would almost as soon rot in a madhouse or a bastille as endure an existence in which there were no chances."

The man who was far away waiting for the turn of his luck on the Australian gold-fields had been something of this temper—had not been formed by nature or disposition for a farmer, in fact.

While Mr. Walgrave sauntered slowly about the garden, loitering now and then to look at a rose-bush, and anon absorbed in his own meditations, forgetting why he had stopped, and standing gazing dreamily at the flowers without seeing them Grace watched him from behind the dimity window-curtain, idly wondering what he was thinking about; wondering a little, too, about his past history.

Mr. Wort had told them scarcely anything—only that he had no near relations, and stood almost alone in the world. That had a pathetic sound, which went far to awaken the girl's quick sympathy. She was sorry for him, concluding at once that this loneliness of his was a source of sadness. This compassion was, however, lessened a little now she had seen him. He did not look like a man whose life was overshadowed by sorrow; he looked a hard-headed, hard-hearted man of the world, she thought; and she repeated to herself that little speech of his about success in life. He was ambitious, no doubt; and to the ambitious man the tenderest ties must be as nothing—or, at any rate, so Grace Redmayne supposed. And he would achieve what he desired, no doubt, and be a judge, or something of that kind. She had very little sympathy with the form of his ambition. If he had been a soldier, panting to exterminate his fellow-men, she might have exalted him into a hero. But a lawyer—no halo of romance could surround the head that wore a wig with an ugly black patch at the top. She had been in the court once at Maidstone, when her father had some small suit going forward, and had formed her estimate of the Bar from the two or three careless barristers she had seen there.

It was nearly ten o'clock when Mr. Walgrave finished his third cigar, after a complete circuit of garden and orchard, and a peep at the mysteries of the farmyard—where a family of irreproachable pigs were granting and struggling over their evening meal of second-rate potatoes and skim milk—and went

back to his sitting-room. A pair of composite candles, in tall old-fashioned plated candlesticks of a masonic aspect, were burning on the round table. He rang for a second pair, drew the four candles into a little cluster at his left elbow, selected three or four big brown volumes from the litter on the floor, and began to read law.

Ten minutes after he had opened his book, the notes of the piano were touched softly, and a low sweet voice began "Kathleen Mavourneen."

He pushed away his book with an impatient gesture, and flung himself back in his chair.

"If this sort of thing is going to last," he said to himself, "I may as well give up all idea of work at once. And if this thing is to occur every evening, Brierwood will not have me long."

He listened to "this sort of thing" notwithstanding; and the contraction of his eyebrows relaxed a little presently, nay, something like a smile began to glimmer upon his face. He listened to a plaintive German waltz, a very old one, played with a tender grace akin to the sweetness of the melody. He listened to an old ballad of Wade's, "O, do you remember the first time I met you?" worth a hundred of our modern drawing-room songs. He listened, and was pleased. The music only lasted a quarter of an hour altogether. It was not much time to lose. He went back to his books with a faint sigh of regret, and tried to concentrate his mind upon the decision of a Chancery judge in a certain important case that bore somewhat upon a case he had himself in hand for the winter term.

The low touching voice haunted him a little, interfering with his thorough appreciation of the most subtle points in the judge's discourse. He had to put away the thought of it with an effort; and yet he would have been scarcely sorry if the singer had begun again.

There was no chance of that, however. He heard doors opening and shutting presently, bolting and barring of outer portals, and the sound of light and heavy footsteps on the creaky old staircase. The servant came in to ask if he required anything more, and at what hour he would wish to breakfast next morning.

"At nine o'clock; or you may make it between nine and ten if you like. I'm not a very early man. Who was that singing just now?"

"Miss Grace, sir. She's a rare one to sing;" and the girl dropped a curtsy and retired, marvelling at the extravagant of the London gentleman, who wanted four candles to read by.

"I suppose they all do it up in London," she thought. "Poor things, they must be a most blind along of the smoke!"

Mr. Walgrave read till one o'clock; then regaled himself with

a composing cigar, drank a glass of cold water, and went slowly up to his bedroom—that spacious old-fashioned bed-chamber in which Rick Redmayne had spent so many restless nights pondering upon his difficulties.

CHAPTER IV.

"THE TRUE TITIAN COLOUR."

THE next morning was bright and warm—a real June morning; Sunday morning too, made joyous by the bells of Kingsbury Church, chiming a hymn tune, that sounded sweet and clear across the intervening meadows, and came in at Hubert Walgrave's open window, blending itself with a dream in which he fancied himself away from Brierwood, amidst the gorgeous upholstery of a West-end mansion, listening to a voice that was not so sweet as Grace Redmayne's. The bells awoke him at last, and he looked round him with a yawn, pleased to find himself in the quiet farmhouse.

"Thank Heaven for a tranquil day!" he thought. "No ritualistic ceremonials in an atmosphere of rondoletia and patchouli, with the thermometer at ninety; no Kensington-gardens after luncheon; no petty scandals and inanities all day long; no dreary, dreary, dreary eight-o'clock dinner, with the dismal tramp of some solitary passer-by sounding in the intervals of the conversation all through the big dusty square; no Mendelssohn in the evening. Thank Heaven for a day of repose, for a day in which I can live my own life!"

This was ungrateful. The life of which Mr. Walgrave was complaining was a life that ought by rights to have been very pleasant to him; a life which, with more or less modification, he had elected to lead for the remainder of his existence.

He got up and dressed, taking plenty of time for all the operations of his toilet, enjoying the rare delight of not being in a hurry. He had been wont to live always under pressure: to dress with his watch open on the dressing-table; to breakfast with his watch beside his plate; to mete out the exact time which he could spare for his reading; to hasten from place to place; to spend all his days in a kind of mental fever, half his nights in restlessness engendered of over-fatigue.

It was scarcely strange if he had broken down at last under such a life. But even now, warned by the doctors that he sorely needed rest, he could not be utterly idle. The habit of hard work was too strong upon him; and he had brought his books down to Brierwood, resolved to get through long arrears of reading.

To the Bitter End.

The bells rang, and died out into silence—the sweet summer silence, broken by hum of bees and song of birds, and the cuckoo's plaintive minor coming with a muffled sound from a neighbouring copse. The bells would ring again for the eleven o'clock service; but Mr. Walgrave did not mean to go to church. He intended to abandon himself to the delight of thorough idleness; to drain the cup of simple rustic joys, which were so new to him. Intent on this, he went down to breakfast in his morning coat, wheeled the table to an open window, and then pounced at once upon a bundle of weekly papers, which he had brought down to Brierwood with him—the *Athenæum*, *Saturday Review*, *Spectator*, *Observer*. This is how Mr. Walgrave enjoyed the country.

The church bells had rung their last peal before he had finished his leisurely breakfast, or got half through his papers; and the farmhouse was as quiet as some dim empty village church which a tourist enters with reverent footstep on a summer afternoon. There was no one at home but Sally the servant-maid, shelling peas on a sunny door-step in the back premises, and meditating upon the iniquity of the lodger, who sat half buried in the great arm-chair—a family institution sacred to the grandfathers and grandmothers of the Redmayne race—with his legs stretched out upon another chair, reading newspapers, while all right-minded people, not in service, were at church.

The papers were finished at last. Mr. Walgrave laughed once or twice over the broad columns of the *Saturday*—that half-cynical laugh which is called a snigger—pished and pshawed a little now and then, and finally tossed the heap of periodicals aside, muttering the usual remark, that there was nothing in them. All the freshness of the morning was gone by this time, and the sun was at his meridian. Mr. Walgrave strolled into the garden, took out his capacious cigar-case as he went along, and lighted his noontide weed. He walked over the same ground he had explored on the previous evening, stared at the roses, admired the old cedar, threaded the grassy mazes of the orchard, peeped into the farmyard, and made friends with an ancient gray donkey of benevolent aspect, whom he found resting his chin contemplatively on a five-barred gate; made friends with the donkey, and thought of that brightest of English writers, Laurence Sterne, who has associated himself with the asinine species for all time. The donkey is by nature a social beast; it is the chief affliction of his life, perhaps, that horses refuse to know him.

There was one old man in the farmyard, sitting on the low wall of a pigsty, asleep in the sun. Mr. Walgrave came and went without awakening him.

"That is what rest means," he said to himself, as he walked

slowly away. "I daresay it is perfect bliss to that man to sleep in the sun with the odour of pigs in his nostrils."

When he had made a circuit of the garden, dawdled ever so long under the cedar, and sniffed at the roses, he went back to the house. Morning church was over. He smelt roast meat, and saw a family party sitting at dinner in the parlour opposite his own. He caught just a glimpse of a youthful head, with reddish-brown hair, but did not see the face belonging to it.

"The true Titian colour," he said to himself, with only a passing glance, and walked into his sitting-room, incurious.

The maid came presently to ask if he would take any luncheon. "No; unless a basket of soda-water, which he had ordered had come for him, he would take nothing." No basket had arrived. Goods were conveyed from London to Edinburgh in less time than from London to Brierwood. There was no rail nearer than Tunbridge Junction, and only a sleepy old carrier to bridge the intervening distance.

The maid returned to her dinner in the back kitchen; and Mr. Walgrave, having drained the cup of rustic pleasure, yawned, and looked wistfully at his law-books.

He had promised his doctor that he would rest, and had worked hard till one o'clock that morning. No, he could scarcely go to his law-books to-day. He wandered round the room; examined its artistic decorations—ancient prints representing the death of General Wolfe, the reformed House of Commons, Daniel in the lion's den, and so on—with a grim smile; looked at Izaak Walton, and *Johnson's Dictionary*, and an old volume of the *Farmer's Magazine*; and after this survey went back to the table by the window.

"I suppose I had better write to Augusta," he said to himself, opening a ponderous russia-leather despatch-box. "Of course she'll expect a letter. What can I write about?—that old man asleep among the pigs, or that friendly donkey? or shall I go into raptures about the roses, or that girl's voice last night? There's not much material for a Horace Walpole at Brierwood; but I must write something."

He took out a quire of paper stamped with a great gothic monogram, and began:

"My dear Augusta,"—"She's the only Augusta I know," he said to himself; "so it would be a lapse in grammar to call her dearest.") "My dear Augusta,—Just a line to inform you of my establishment at Brierwood, which is a pleasant old place enough: donkeys and roses, and pigs and strawberries-and-cream, and all that kind of thing; but direfully dull. I have read all the papers, and fear I shall be driven to going to afternoon service at Kingsbury Church by sheer inability to get rid

of my day. How horrified you will be by the levity of that remark! But I had intended to indemnify myself for all I have suffered from your favourite Mr. Reredos, of St. Sulpice, West Brompton, by a temporary lapse into paganism. I daresay you are receiving your usual Sunday droppers-in—discussing the sermon, the contents of the plate, whether liberal or otherwise, and the bonnets—while I write this. And then you will go to the Gardens, and walk up and down, and wonder at the strange beings from lower deeps of society whom you meet there. Did you go to Covent Garden last night? I see they gave *La Favorita*. The air here is purity itself, and I think will set me up very shortly. I mean to obey the doctors, however, and withdraw myself from the delights of civilised life for a long time—until the winter term, in fact. I need not say that my thoughts follow you in this seclusion, and that I wish you were here to brighten my solitude. Give my best remembrances to your father, and believe me to remain your affectionate

HUBERT WALGRAVE."

"I think it's about as inane an epistle as was ever penned," he said to himself, when he had addressed his letter to Miss Vallory, 10 Acropolis Square, South Kensington.

The fact of having written it seemed some relief to his mind, however. He cast himself down upon the hard sofa, and slumbered perhaps as sweetly as the old labourer in the farm-yard. The afternoon bells woke him, and he got up quickly, and went to fetch his hat.

"I'll go and see what the barbarians are like," he said to himself.

He tapped at the opposite door, to ask his way to church. It was opened by Mrs. James, stiff and solemn in her Sunday cap and gown. She opened the door wide enough to give Mr. Walgrave a full view of the room; but the Titianesque head of hair was not visible.

"Gone to church perhaps," he thought, "or out in the garden."

Mrs. James gave him most precise directions for finding Kingsbury and Kingsbury Church. It was a pleasant walk across the fields, she said.

"But you'll be late, sir," she added; "it's half-an-hour's walk at the least, and the bells have been ringing above a quarter."

"Never mind that, Mrs. Redmayne; I want to see the church."

"It's not much of a church for any one from London to see, sir; but the rector's a good man and a good preacher; you'll be none the worse for hearing him."

"I hope I may derive some profit from his instruction," said Mr. Walgrave, smiling.

He went by the meadow-path to which he had been directed, hugging the hedges, which grew high above him, rich in honeysuckle and dog-roses, fox-gloves and fern. A delicious walk. He had no sense of loneliness; forgot all about Augusta Vallory and Acropolis Square; forgot to dream his ambitious dreams of future success; forgot everything but the perfumed air about him, and the cloudless blue sky above his head. He had nearly two miles to walk, but to this tired dweller in cities it was like a walk in Paradise. Though he had not very long been released from the regimen of a sick-room, he felt no fatigue or weakness, and was almost sorry when a turnstile let him out of the last meadow on to a little hilly common, in the midst of which stood Kingsbury Church—an unpretending building with trees about it.

The service was conducted in a quiet old-fashioned manner. That ancient institution, the clerk, was in full force; the number of the hymn to be sung was put up in white movable figures on a little black board, for the convenience of the congregation. The sermon was a friendly, familiar discourse, practical to the last degree, brightened by homely touches of humour now and then; a sermon which might fairly be supposed to come home to the hearts and minds of a simple rustic congregation.

While the hymns were being sung, Mr. Walgrave looked about him. He had taken his place at the end of the church, near the door, in the shadow of the little gallery, and could see everything without making himself conspicuous.

Yes, there was the Titianesque head of hair; he recognised it in a moment, though he had only caught that brief glimpse through the parlour window. A girl stood in one of the high pews about half-way down the centre aisle; a tall slender figure, in a lavender muslin dress and a straw bonnet, under which appeared a mass of red-brown hair. He had no opportunity of seeing her face during the service.

"I daresay she has the complexion that usually accompanies that coloured hair," he said to himself—"a sickly white, pepper-castored with freckles. But if one dared guess by the turn of a woman's head, and that great knot of glorious hair, one might imagine her pretty."

One did imagine her pretty; or at least one was curiously eager to discover the fact. When the sermon was over, Mr. Walgrave contrived his departure so as to leave the church side by side with Grace Redmayne. He saw her glance shyly at him, evidently aware of his identity.

She was very pretty. That sweet fair face, which was actually by no means perfect, impressed him with a sense of perfect beauty. It was so different from—from other faces he knew, had such a tender softness and womanliness. "A face to make

a fool of a strong man," he thought. "Happily I was never in love in my life, and have a convenient knack of admiring beauty in the abstract. If I were a painter, I should be rabid to have that girl upon canvas," he said to himself. "What a Gretchen she would make!"

He walked at a respectful distance from her as they crossed the common, but ventured to overtake her at the turnstile.

"Miss Redmayne, I think," he said, smiling, as he fell back to let her pass into the meadow.

"Yes," she replied, with a little timid inclination of the graceful head, and blushing vividly.

This was quite introduction enough for Mr. Walgrave.

"I have been to hear your worthy rector; really a charming old man—such a relief after the people I have to listen to in town! And your church is a delightfully rustic old place. The benches are rather hard, and your charity children make a somewhat objectionable noise with their boots. If they could be put away in an upper loft somewhere, like Eutychus, only warranted *not* to fall down, it would be better."

Miss Redmayne smiled, yet felt a little angry with him for what she considered a sneer at Kingsbury Church. It seemed as if he looked down upon all her surroundings from some inaccessible height which he occupied ever so remote from her. The notion was a foolish one, no doubt, but it pained her.

He went on talking of the church, the sermon, the children; and anon began to question his companion about Kingsbury and the neighbourhood—what scenes and places round about were best worth seeing, what walks he ought to take; and so beguiled the way by this converse, that the Sunday afternoon journey home, which Grace was apt to consider rather a weary business, seemed shortened.

She told him about Sir Francis Clevedon's place.

"You will go to see Clevedon, of course," she said. "It is not a show place—not shown to strangers, that is to say; but as you know Mr. Wort, you would have no difficulty about seeing it."

"I have seen it—once," he answered rather absently; "but I wouldn't mind going over it again. A fine old house, with noble surroundings. Rather a pity that it should go to ruin, isn't it?"

"I think it will be restored soon," Grace answered hopefully; and then went on to tell the stranger all about Sir Francis Clevedon, and the probability that his kinswoman's timely demise would place him in a position to occupy the old house.

Mr. Walgrave listened with so moody a brow, that Grace stopped suddenly by and by, wounded to think that her talk had wearied him. He was not even conscious of the stoppage, but walked on for some minutes lost in thought until, awaken-

ing all at once from his reverie, he turned to her abruptly, and began some new subject, talking to her of the farm, her aunt and uncle, her cousins, her singing.

"I hope I didn't disturb you," she said, when he paid her some compliment about "Kathleen Mavourneen." "I am very fond of music, and it is my only amusement; but if I thought it disturbed you——"

"I beg to be disturbed like that every evening, though I don't suppose it will materially advance my legal studies. And so you are fond of music? Of course I knew that, after hearing you play and sing: there is a touch and a tone that can only come from the soul—not to be taught by a music-mistress, teach she never so wisely. Were you ever in London?"

"Never," answered Grace with a sigh.

"Then you have never been to the Italian Opera, nor to any of those concerts which abound in London. That is a loss for any one so fond of music as you are."

He thought of all the loss in this girl's life—a life destined to go on to the end, perhaps, buried among green fields and farm-yards. Here was a waste of rare flower-like beauty, and a sensitive sympathetic nature!

"Poor little thing!" he said to himself compassionately; "she ought to have been born the daughter of a gentleman. It seems a hard thing for such a sweet flower to be thrown away. She will marry some great hulking farmer, no doubt; one of those raw-bred lads who carried my portmanteau upstairs, most likely; marry him, and be happy ever after, not dreaming of having missed a brighter life."

They walked on by the high tangled hedge in its glory of honeysuckle and wild roses. The barrister felt the very atmosphere a delight, after London, and "society," and hard work, and the thralldom of a sick-room.

"It is a very sweet world we are born into, after all," he said, "if we only knew how to make the most of it."

His own particular idea of making the most of life hitherto had been, to bring himself to the very edge of the grave by dint of sheer hard work—work that had for its motive power only a selfish solitary man's ambition to push a little way in advance of his fellows. To-day, amidst this fair rural landscape, which in its tender pastoral character was more familiar to him on the canvas of Creswick or Linnel than in actual fact, he began to feel almost doubtful as to the soundness of his views, to meditate even whether it might not be better to take life easily, let Fortune come to him at her own time, and take his fill of honeysuckle and dog-roses—honeysuckle and dog-roses, and innocent girlish society like this, which seemed only an element of the pastoral landscape and the summer afternoon.

He found himself talking with unwonted animation presently—talking of himself, as a man is apt to do when his interlocutor is a trifle beneath him in status—talking pleasantly enough, but with a dash of egotism, of his solitary life in London chambers, his professional drudgery, and so on,—with a little descriptive sketch of London society.

Very speedily he discovered that he was not talking to a beautiful inanity. The girl's bright face flashed back every gleam of brightness in his talk. She had a keen sense of humour, as well as of poetry, this country-bred lass; had read a great deal of light literature, in the tranquil idleness of orchard and garden; had read her Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray, her Byron, Tennyson, Hood, and Longfellow, not once, but many times, and with a quick appreciative mind.

"Yon remind me of Pendennis," she said, smiling, when Mr. Walgrave had described his bachelor life.

"Do I? I would rather remind you of some one better than that selfish shallow young cynic. Warrington is the hero of that book. But I suppose a solitary man, working for his own advancement, always must seem selfish. If I had a flock of hungry children to toil for, now, you would think me quite a sublime character."

"I don't see why ambition should be selfish," Grace answered shyly. "I respect a man for being ambitious, energetic, industrious, though I am so idle myself. There is my dear father, who has gone out to Australia to make a fortune: do you think I don't admire him for his courage, though it is such a grief to lose him?"

"Of course you admire him; but then he is working for *you*—he has a motive outside his own existence, and a very sweet one," added Mr. Walgrave in a lower key.

"He is working as much for Brierwood as for me; more, indeed. He is so proud of his good old name, and the house and land that have belonged to the Redmaynes for nearly three hundred years."

The stranger's face darkened a little.

"Yes," he said moodily; "even in these philosophical days there are men who are proud of that kind of thing. 'What's in a name?' One man drags a time-honoured title through the gutter, and squanders a splendid fortune in unmanly frivolities; another works like a slave to create for himself a name out of namelessness. Fools both, no doubt."

They were at Brierwood by this time, and parted at the garden gate in quite a ceremonious manner. It was almost an adventure for Grace. She felt her heart beating all the faster for it as she ran upstairs to her own sunny room, with lattice windows, and great beams across the ceiling—a room in which men and women had slept when James I. was king.

There was an odour of dinner in the house when she went downstairs presently, with a little cluster of red roses at her breast, and a carefully-arranged collar. A duck made his last stage of existence unpleasantly obvious to those who were not going to eat him—his vulgar savouriness refined just a little by the perfume of a cherry-tart. There was an unwonted bustle too, and aunt Hannah was darting about the passage flushed and snappish, superintending the movements of "the girl," who came along with her eyes fixed, and her breathing stertorous, and a dish grasped convulsively in her clumsy hands.

This Sunday-afternoon tea-time was wont to be the very quietest hour in all the course of life at Brierwood: uncle James dozing over his newspaper; aunt Hannah dispensing the tea-cups, with an open Bible before her; the two young men crunching lettuces audibly, like rabbits, and consuming great wedges of bread-and-butter, afraid to talk much, lest they should be accused of profaneness and Sabbath-breaking. How many such a summer Sunday afternoon Grace had endured, sitting by the open window, turning the leaves of her hymn-book idly, and looking at a stray flower shut in between the pages here and there to mark the place of a favourite hymn: "Sun of my soul," and "Jerusalem the golden"! Not unhappy afternoons, only blank and empty, in which her soul had longed for the wings of some strong sea-bird, that she might fly across the world and join her father in his rough colonial life.

So to Grace Redmayne the little bustle attendant upon the stranger's dinner, even poor Sarah's scared face, and aunt Hannah's snappishness, were not unpleasant. This confusion was something out of the beaten tract; she forgot that it was an affliction to have a lodger. Aunt Hannah came into tea presently, grumbling at the ways of people who wanted their dinner when other people were thinking of their supper.

"I daresay Mr. Walgrave would dine early on Sunday, if you asked him, aunt," Grace said, while Mrs. James was pouring out the tea. "He seems very good-natured."

"Stuff and nonsense, child! what do you know about his good-nature? Seems, indeed! You've only seen him through a window—how can you tell what he seems?"

"I saw him this afternoon, coming home from church. He spoke to me, and walked with me, a little, and he was very pleasant."

Mrs. James looked thoughtful, not to say displeased. She had Mr. Wort's warranty for the lodger's steadiness; nor was Mr. Walgrave in the first flush of youth, or distinguished by that debonair manner with which women are apt to associate the idea of danger. Still it would not do for him to be dancing attendance upon Richard Redmayne's daughter. No familiar acquaintance between those two could be permitted.

To the Bitter End

"How far did he walk with you, pray?" Mrs. James inquired severely.

Grace blushed. It was the most foolish thing in the world, of course, since she had not the slightest cause for blushing; but to be taxed so sternly about such a trifle brought the hot blood into the fair young face.

"He overtook me at the stile, and came home through the fields."

"He walked all the way home with you, then. What do you mean by 'a little'?"

"I couldn't help his walking beside me, aunt, and talking a little, if he pleased. I couldn't be rude to him, when he was so respectful—just as if I had been a lady of his own rank."

"I don't know how your father would like your taking up with strangers," said aunt Hannah.

"I don't know how my father would like your taking lodgers," answered Grace. And Mrs. James quailed for a moment with a guilty sense that, in her economic arrangement, she had taken a step which Richard Redmayne—as proud a man as ever trod that Kentish soil—would have considered an outrage upon his race.

"Come, come!" exclaimed uncle James, "you two women are always squabbling. Where's the harm, if the lass gave a civil answer when the gentleman spoke to her? You wouldn't have her run away from him as if he was a dragon going to eat her. I like a girl that can speak up bold and frank. The gentleman's a gentleman; we've got John Wort's word for that: he wouldn't offer to bring any one here that wasn't."

"He'd no call to follow Grace home from church," said aunt Hannah, subdued but not silenced.

"He didn't follow me, aunt," cried Grace, indignantly; "what can put such notions into your head? He was at church, and I was at church, and we had to come home the same way."

"Ah!" sighed the matron, "I suppose you know best; but you don't go to afternoon church next Sunday."

The object of this discussion came sauntering up to the open window presently, socially disposed, and began a friendly conversation with James Redmayne about the aspect of the country, and such homely matters as might be supposed to interest the agricultural mind. Grace drew back into a corner of the room, and opened her hymn-book; but though she did honestly try to read some of the sweet familiar verses, her ear was distracted by the languid voice of the stranger—a voice so unlike common Kentish voices.

It was the family custom to spend Sunday evening, and every idle evening, more or less in the garden; and of course the stranger's advent was not entirely to change the common course of things. James Redmayne took his pipe and tobacco-

jar; the young men carried a table and chairs under the cedar; and presently they were all sitting there in the usual fashion, only with Mr. Walgrave hovering near them doubtfully, still talking agriculture with the farmer.

"Fetch Mr. Walgry a arm-chair, Charley," James said to his son; "perhaps he'd like to smoke his cigar among us, in a homely way."

"I should like nothing better," said Mr. Walgrave; "not an arm-chair though, Charley; any chair. May I really smoke my cigar, Mrs. Redmayne? You won't object to an extra weed?"

Mrs. James glanced at the flower-border, with some vague idea about groundsel or shepherd's-purse.

"Lord bless you!" exclaimed her husband; "she don't mind tobacker; she's used to it, like the eels. Sit down and make yourself at home; and if you ever drink anything as vulgar as hollands-and-water, I can offer you the genuine article."

"Thanks; there is nothing better than hollands; but I have to preserve a strict regimen."

"You're in one of them blessed rifle-corpses, I suppose," said Mr. James, to his niece's shame.

"I beg your pardon, no; I mean to say that I am allowed to take nothing stronger than sherry and soda-water."

"That's what I call cat-lap," remarked the farmer; and again Grace blushed. That Tunbridge Wells education of hers had made her sensitive about these trifles.

Mr. Walgrave took his seat among them, and lighted his cigar.

"I am very glad to make myself at home in your pleasant family circle," he said; "for in spite of all that has been said about solitude in the midst of a crowd, and that kind of thing, I think a man who finds himself amongst green fields best knows the value of his fellow-man's society."

The sun went down behind a screen of lime and sycamore, and all the western sky changed from gold to crimson, and from crimson to purple, while Mr. Walgrave sat smoking and talking under the old cedar; Grace seated a little way off, on the other side of her cousin Charley's ponderous figure. Little by little the conversation drifted away from agriculture, and also from James Redmayne, who could not keep a very tight hold upon any discourse soaring above crops or markets, or humble local politics. Little by little the talk became entirely between Mr. Walgrave and Grace, the girl answering shyly now and then, and at intervals hazarding some timid utterance of her own thoughts.

It was aunt Hannah's invariable practice to indulge herself with a nap on Sunday evening. On every other evening than Sunday she was brisk and active, vigilant and wakeful to the

last, although on every other day she got through three times the amount of work. But the Sunday work, the church-going, and the best-bonnet wearing, the Bible-reading, and the general state and ceremony of the day, conduced to slumber, and it was as much as aunt Hannah could do to keep her eyes open for half an hour after tea. To-night Mr. Walgrave's quiet talk, with intervals of silence every now and then, as he smoked his cigar meditatively, watching the transient glories of the sky, had a peculiarly soothing effect; and Mrs. James, who had intended to keep a sharp eye upon her niece and the lodger, slumbered sweetly, with her hard-working hands crossed upon her smart silk apron, and her cap ever and anon nodding gently.

They had it all to themselves, Grace and the stranger. Wandering alone in some primeval forest, they could scarcely have been more lonely.

Mr. Walgrave compared this evening with many other Sunday evenings which he had spent of late years, since he had begun to be a successful man—a man of some mark in his particular line: Sunday evenings with friends who were “at home” on that evening; Sunday evenings in the spacious drawing-rooms of Acropolis Square, enlivened by Bach and Handel; Sunday evenings in faster company at Richmond or Greenwich, with the same dinners, the same wines, the same kind of talk for ever and ever. How much pleasanter it was to sit under the cedar, in that rose-scented old garden, while uncle James and aunt Hannah snored peacefully, and a sweet girlish face looked at him out of the summer dusk! Man is by nature egotistical. It was pleasant to talk so freely of himself, and his own feelings and fancies, with an instinctive consciousness that he was admired and understood; to be the central figure in the group, and not one of a herd. He did not take the trouble to analyse his sensations just yet; but by and by, when the Redmayne family had wished him good-night and retired, carrying their belongings with them, like a gipsy camp,—by and by, in the summer silence, when he walked alone under the stars, smoking his final cigar, he told himself that he had never in his life been happier.

“Arcadian,” he said to himself, “but soothing. I suppose, after all, that really is happiness—to rest from labour, to turn one's back upon this crowded world and all its complications and artificialities; to live one's own life for a little, without ulterior object of any kind. What a pretty girl that is! And so intelligent too; with a nature so much above her surroundings! A pity; some day she will find this farmhouse life too narrow for her—the hulking farmer-husband too dull and uncouth.”

He thought of Grace Redmayne a good deal, as he smoked that last meditative cigar—first, because she was really the only person worth thinking about at Brierwood; and secondly, because he had been surprised to find so bright a creature in such a place. He thought of her, and compared her with other women he had known, not at all to the advantage of those others. And later in the night he had strange dreams, in which Grace Redmayne's image appeared amidst the wildest confusion of places and circumstances—a sweet young face, lily-fair, a bright young head crowned with hedgerow flowers.

CHAPTER V.

MR. WALGRAVE INDULGES HIS SOCIAL INSTINCTS.

AFTER that Sunday evening, Mr. Walgrave became more or less one of the family at Brierwood. He did not take too much advantage of his privileges, for he spent his days, for the most part, in rambles far afield, and devoted his evenings to hard reading; but there were odd half hours in every day, and some friendly hour in every evening, which he spent under the cedar, or in the family parlour, talking to Grace, looking over her music, examining her little stock of books, and taking breath, as it were, after a long spell of law. Altogether, he was so unobtrusive that Mrs. James could find no ground for complaint, and considered as a lodger he was simply perfection. He had insisted on less ceremony and trouble about his dinner—that there should be nothing but a cold joint and a salad, or a chop, ready for him at half-past seven, instead of the elaborate six o'clock banquet which Mrs. James had supposed indispensable. About half-past nine, the family supper-time, he took a large cup of strong tea, and was ready for his nightly reading when the household went to bed. But for the one hour between this late dinner and tea, he gave himself up entirely to the delights of the summer twilight and the garden, talking agriculture with uncle James under the cedar, or strolling beside the borders with Grace as she trimmed her roses, and snipped off the withered flowers with a formidable pair of garden scissors. She was quite at her ease with him now, and had already learnt a good deal by this association—had extended her reading into a wider field under his guidance. He had sent to London for a little packet of books for her—Mrs. Browning and Adelaide Procter, and other modern lights, whereof she had known nothing before his coming.

The summer was exceptionally fine. Day after day the sun shone out of a cloudless heaven; the corn grew tall on the undu-

lating land about Brierwood; and James Redmayne, who declared that in England drought never bred naught, was well content with the unvarying succession of brilliant days. Mr. Walgrave had been five weeks in this seclusion, his rural life only broken by an occasional journey to London, to see one or two important solicitors, and let them know that he was not going to remain much longer out of harness. He had not many duties of a social character to detain him in town. The London season was over, and most of his friends were away—the Acropolis-square people, Mr. Vallory and his daughter, in Germany—so he never stayed more than one day away from the farm. That Kentish air was setting him up wonderfully. His doctor, on whom he called while he was in London, declared himself astounded by the improvement.

"You are taking my advice, I can see," he said, "and giving that overworked brain of yours a thorough rest."

Mr. Walgrave did not take the trouble to undeceive him. No; he was not giving his brain a holiday by any means. He had a case coming on late in the year in which he hoped to make a great success, to lift himself above the ruck at once and for ever by his conduct of this one trial, and he was cramming himself vigorously for this encounter; but the hard work seemed unusually light to him, his life was brighter and pleasanter than it had ever been. This jaded man of the world could not have believed a country life would have suited him so well.

He had made a complete circuit of the country within twenty miles of Brierwood, exploring every gentleman's seat and every ruin accessible to the tourist, with a single exception. That was Clevedon. One morning, loitering by the open window of the common parlour, where Grace had been practising, while Mrs. James sat absorbed in the profound study of some marital garment that stood in need of serious repair, he proposed that they should make a party and go to see Clevedon together.

"You know the place, and you know Wort," he said; "we can arrange for him to meet us at the house and show us everything. Why shouldn't we make a rough-and-ready picnic of it?—take a cold dinner and dine in the room where Sir Lucas Clevedon entertained the Prince Regent. I haven't had a picnic since I've been here; and I remember when I was a lad, and spent my midsummer holidays at a farm in Norfolk, they gave me at least half-a-dozen picnics. I have to complain of a want of hospitality on your part, Mrs. Redmayne, in this respect."

Grace laughed a low, happy laugh, and even aunt Hannah's hard features relaxed into a smile, as she paused from the solemn consideration as to whether a patch under the arm or a new binder would be the wiser form of repair.

"Lord bless you, Mr. Walgry; as if a gentleman like you

could care about such picnics as we could give! You'd want a brass band and a markwee, and a bus-and-four, I should think, before you'd call anything a picnic!"

"My dear Mrs. Redmayne, I want a roast leg of lamb, a salad, and a bottle of sherry, packed in a basket. I want you and your family to come with me, and I daresay we shall enjoy our dinner as much as ever the Prince Regent enjoyed his, though Sir Lucas Clevedon's cook may have been one of the greatest artists of his time."

Aunt Hannah hesitated a little, gave a sharp glance at her niece—was it on *her* account the barrister was so friendly?—but, on the whole, had not much to urge against Mr. Walgrave's proposal. It would be very rude to oppose any desire of such a model lodger's; so modest a wish, too, and one which was in itself a condescension.

"Well, sir, if you'd like to spend a day at Clevedon with James and me and Grace and her cousins, I've nothing to say against it," she said, "except that it doesn't seem the sort of thing a gentleman like you would care for. We're very homely people, you see, and——"

"You're very pleasant people, Mrs. Redmayne. Believe me, I wish for no better society."

He stole a glance at Grace, who was intently studying a page in her music-book. He could not see her eyes, but there was a happy smile upon the rosy lips, which betokened that the idea of the picnic was not unwelcome to her.

"Shall we say to-morrow, then? The less time we lose the better, for fear this splendid weather should change."

"No fear of that, sir," replied aunt Hannah, who had been planning the picnic dinner, and calculating what time she should want for its preparation. She meant that it should be something more elaborate than a leg of lamb and a salad. "Say the day after to-morrow," she said.

"The day after to-morrow, then—and you'll arrange with Wort; or I can walk over this afternoon and settle the thing with him, if you like."

"Just as you please, Mr. Walgry. I'm sure John Wort will be ready to do anything you wish."

"Yes," answered the lodger, in his lazy way, "Wort has always stood my friend."

"He's known you a long time, sir, he said," hazarded Mrs. James, who was not without some feminine curiosity about the stranger's antecedents.

"He has known me all my life, ma'am," Mr. Walgrave answered gravely.

Grace looked up from her music with great wistful eyes. In all his free-and-easy talk about himself he had never spoken of

father or mother, home or childhood. That allusion to a holiday spent in Norfolk, just now, was the first hint he had ever given them of his boyish history; and Grace, who had so little to do except to wonder, had spent many an idle hour wondering about him.

Mr. Walgrave dropped in upon the steward on his return from a long ramble. He was getting just a little tired of those lonely wanderings, and more inclined to dawdle away his day in the Brierwood garden and orchard. A comfortable place for reading in, that orchard. He had brought down some of his favourite authors—Montaigne and Burton, Sterne and De Quincey—books taken at random from the crowded shelves in his chambers—books that a man may read for ever and ever; and he had sent to the London Library for a box of newer literature—the last volumes of Froude and Motley, the newest thing in metaphysics, a dark-blue octavo filled with questionable verse, the latest French novel. Provided with these, he found the delights of the orchard inexhaustible; and to lie stretched at full length upon the short mossy grass, with a little shower of unripe apples fluttering down upon him ever and anon, a repose as sweet as the slumbers of Achilles on the lap of Helen, in that enchanted isle whither those two were wafted after the end of Troy.

The steward was quite ready to oblige him, but wondered a little at this picnic business, and at Mr. Walgrave's condescension.

"I shouldn't have thought it was in your line," he said.

"Nothing is in my line, my dear Wort, except hard work. But it is such a new thing for me to take a holiday, that I'm shaken out of my normal self, as it were, and eager for any kind of rustic amusement. These people are uncommonly friendly, and I've quite fraternised with them lately. I really didn't know man was such a gregarious animal. I thought with books and fly-fishing I should not have the least need of human society; and in a week or ten days I began to cultivate these worthy Redmaynes. 'Man was not made to live alone.' The day after to-morrow, then, Wort. You'll meet us at the old house, I suppose?"

"Well, yes, I can meet you there, if you like. Or say at the south lodge; that's the nearest to Brierwood; and I can take you by a short cut through the park. But you went over the house two years ago, from garret to cellar. I shouldn't have thought you'd have cared to see it again."

"Shouldn't you? I have a fancy for the neglected old place, you see. I'm not going to peer and pry into every hole and corner as I did last time, when I wanted to arrive at a fair estimate of Sir Francis Clevedon's heritage." These last words were said with some touch of bitterness, as if this man were not

above the low vice of envy. "I should like a nice long lazy day, prowling about the house and idling in the gardens."

The wish seemed reasonable enough, and John Wort, who really desired to oblige Mr. Walgrave, had nothing to say against it.

The next day but one was another of those glorious summer days, with the thermometer at seventy-five in the shade and a cloudless blue sky. The corn was yellowing in the fields, as Hubert Walgrave and Grace Redmayne walked along the narrow pathways between the ripening grain and the tall, wild-growing hedges. Mrs. James and her spouse lagged behind a little, tired with a day's work that had been compressed into half a day for the sake of this holiday. The young men brought up the rear, each with a basket, from which there came ever and anon a cool clooping noise, maddeningly suggestive of refreshing drinks imprisoned within the wicker.

Grace was dressed in some pale washed-out muslin that was almost white, with a broad straw hat, that shaded the delicate face, and from the shadow of which the dark-blue eyes shone out starlike. She seemed as joyous as the skylark singing high up in the blue vault above her, and was talking gaily, quite at her ease with the stranger now. Her brightness and intelligence delighted him. Of all the women he had talked to in that world which was his world, he had met none so rich in fancy, so quick to apprehend him, so entirely sympathetic, as this farmer's daughter.

"You ought to be a poet, Grace," he said. He had not waited for any one's permission to call her by her Christian name—every one called her Grace—it seemed only natural that he should do like the rest. "You ought to be a poet. Some of our sweetest and truest poets nowadays are women. Now mind, I shall be really angry, Grace, if ever I hear that you have married a farmer and settled down into a comfortable managing farmer's wife, like aunt Hannah."

That milk-white skin of Grace's grew suddenly crimson, and the blue eyes flashed angrily. Miss Redmayne was by no means the sweetest-tempered of young women.

"I shall never marry a farmer!" she exclaimed.

They were standing face to face at a stile where they had come to a pause, waiting for those stragglers behind to join them.

"Shan't you, do you think?" Mr. Walgrave asked, in his easiest manner; "but why should you be so indignant with me for suggesting the possibility of such a thing? I look upon farming as the most halcyon state of existence. Your father is a farmer, your uncle and cousins are farmers; you live in an atmosphere of farmers, one may say. It is scarcely strange if I thought you might ultimately marry one."

"I shall never marry a farmer," said Grace, still with a touch of anger in look and tone; "I don't suppose I shall ever marry at all. I would much rather——"

She stopped abruptly with her sentence unfinished, and stood silently looking far off with fixed dreamy eyes.

"Much rather do what?"

"Go to my father in Australia, and lead a wild strange life with him."

"Ah, you fancy that it would be Arcadian, poetic, and all that kind of thing. A roving forest life, among pathless woods and tropical flowers; and so on. But it wouldn't. It would be all rude and sordid; a hard perilous life, among men degraded by every vice that the greed of gain can foster. No, no, Grace, don't dream of Australia. Look forward to your father's return; cultivate your intellect, which is an exceptional one, and ten years hence England may be proud of Grace Redmayne."

The girl sighed, and gave him no answer. He too was silent; more thoughtful than he had been all the morning.

It was a hot walk to Clevedon—through corn-fields for the greater part of the way, and then along half a mile of dusty high-road—and a delicious relief when they came to the south lodge, where they found Mr. Wort smoking an ante-prandial pipe in the shady rustic porch, with a stone bottle at his feet.

"I thought I'd bring something," he said; "so I brewed a jorum of milk-punch the day before yesterday, from a famous recipe given to me by Sir Lucas's old butler. It would have been all the better for keeping longer, but I don't think it's bad."

"Lor, Mr. Wort, do you want to make us all tipsy?" remonstrated Mrs. James. "I know what that milk-punch of Sir Lucas's is—you brought us half a gallon last harvest-home. It's the most dangerous stuff any one can put their lips to."

Mr. and Mrs. Redmayne had a good deal to say to Mr. Wort; so those three led the way, the steward carrying his jar sturdily. The two young men scampered off to look for squirrels, and Grace and Mr. Walgrave followed at their leisure, stopping every now and then to admire some fine old tree of nobler growth than the rest, or the long ferny alleys leading off into a deeper woodland. On this side of the park the timber had escaped the devastations of Sir Lucas, who was very much of Sheridan's opinion, that timber is a natural excrescence for the relief of a landowner's necessities. Many a noble oak and beech, elm and chestnut, had fallen under the woodman's axe during the spendthrift's tenure of Clevedon; but here the timber was of a less valuable character, and had been left to flourish even after that final clearing a few years ago, by means of which Mr. Wort had lightened the burdens on Sir Francis's estate.

Grace was somewhat silent, answering absently when Mr. Walgrave spoke to her—paler too than when they had begun their expedition. Her companion looked at her curiously, wondering what had caused the change, she had been so full of life and gaiety a quarter of an hour ago.

"So you are very fond of your father, Grace?" he said presently.

"Fond of my father?" she answered quickly, with a tremulous voice, and flashing a bright sudden look upon him which made her irresistibly beautiful. "Why, there is no one in the world I love but him. I don't mean to say anything unkind or ungrateful about uncle James and aunt Hannah. They are very, very good to me, and I like them—love them even, with a kind of love. But my father—I love *him* with all my heart and soul. Why, do you know that for a year after he left us there was never a night that I did not see him in my dreams—near the sound of his voice—feel the touch of his hand; never a morning that I did not wake disappointed to find he was so far away. The dreams have faded a little now, it is so long—so long since he left us, but I do not regret him less."

"Have you any idea when he will return?"

"O, no. It may be a very long time, or a very short time. He promised not to stay longer than three years at the most; but I know he will not come back till he has succeeded in doing what he went to do."

"To make a fortune, I suppose?"

"To earn enough money to pay every shilling he owes."

"I wish him all prosperity, and I rather envy him his opportunities. Upon my word, if I thought gold were to be had for digging, I think I would buy a spade and go in for the same kind of thing. A professional career is such a slow road to fortune; and as to fame—if a man stops short of the wool-sack, I doubt if there is anything he can do that will render him interesting to posterity. To be less than Lord Thurlow is to be nothing—and I don't suppose you ever heard of Thurlow. A poet now, be he ever so poor a creature, let him achieve but the smallest modicum of fame, has a place in the hearts of women for ever-lasting. I'll wager if you were asked which was the greater man, Kirke White or Brongham, you would swear by Kirke White, and you would think Letitia Landor a finer writer than Junius."

"I am very fond of poetry," Grace answered simply.

"Well, child, go on educating yourself by means of good solid reading, and you shall be a poet some day, like Miss Procter—a poet of the affections—all tenderness and sweetness and music. But you remember what Shelley says, 'They learn in suffering what they teach in song.' You will have to undergo

that educational process in some way or other, I daresay—first girlish fancies wasted on an unworthy object—blighted affection, and that sort of thing.”

The girl looked at him with another of those sudden flashes—this time all anger.

“Why do you talk to me like that?” she asked indignantly; “as if I were the silliest creature in the world, and must needs fall in love with—with what you call an unworthy object. I never mean to love any one but my father. If all the books I have read are true—or half of them—love hardly ever brings anything but sorrow.”

“O yes, it does, Grace; gladness unspeakable sometimes—a renewal of youth—a sweet surprise—a revelation of a new world—the beginning of a fresh life,” said Mr. Walgrave, with an entire change of tone, and an earnestness that was very rare in him. “Don’t be angry with me for what I said just now, I was only half serious.”

CHAPTER VI.

GRACE DISCOVERS A LIKENESS.

THEY were nearly at the house by this time, and had emerged from the neglected woodland on to a wide lawn separated from the park by a ha-ha and a light iron fence. The rest of the party were waiting for them here, wiping their faces with voluminous pocket-handkerchiefs, and altogether in a melting condition. The old house stood before them; a noble building with a massive centre, wings spreading right and left, and at the end of each wing a short colonnade running at right angles with the building. Over the principal door, which was low and broad, there was a great oriel window, a window which was in itself a picture. The roof was masked by a cornice of delicate stonework, open and light, and rich in variety of design as old point-lace, and above this rose innumerable pinnacles of the flamboyant order.

“A fine old place,” said Mr. Walgrave, “a noble background to any man’s life. Hard that it should be abandoned to the rats and the spiders.”

“But it is not to belong to the rats much longer,” said Grace. “Sir Francis will soon be coming home.”

“Perhaps,” answered Mr. Walgrave, with a thoughtful air. “Who knows whether he may ever live to inhabit this place? I am no believer in restorations.”

Mr. Wort rang the bell, which was answered after a considerable interval by the superannuated butler who had seen the face of George IV.—a doddering old man with long gray hair, and

weak faded blue eyes, dressed in threadbare black that had been cut by the minions of Stultz.

This old man brightened a little at sight of Mr. Wort, and stared curiously with his dim eyes at Hubert Walgrave. He was quite ready to show the house.

"I'm sure it's a pleasure to see you and your friends, Mr. Wort," he said. "My old woman and me, we get mazed-like, never seeing no other faces but our own, and the two girls, and the butcher once a week. If it wasn't that we're both fond of the place, for the sake of old times, I don't believe we *could* stand it. I suppose you'd like to go through all the best rooms," he went on, opening one of the numerous doors in the great stone-paved hall, and ushering them into a long gloomy room hung with family portraits, and with a gigantic black-marble mantelpiece at the end—a mantelpiece with a massive pediment supported by Corinthian columns, which looked like the entrance to a tomb. "The ceilings in the upstairs rooms are ever so much worse since you saw them last," continued the butler; "the wet do come in so every time it rains—and we had some heavy rains in spring. As to the rats, I won't say anything about them. What they contrive to live upon, unless it's rotten wood and old plaster and each other, I can't understand; but live *they* do, and increase and multiply. This is James I.'s dining-room; so called because his majesty stayed at Clevedon at the time when he created the first baronet, and dined in this room every day at one o'clock, with Robert Carr Earl of Somerset on his left hand, and Sir John Clevedon on his right; and they do say Sir John was the handsomest man of the two. That's his portrait yonder, in the green velvet suit."

They all looked at the picture, as old Tristram Moles the butler pointed to it. Grace Redmayne had seen the portrait before; but at sight of it to-day she gave a little start, and a faint cry of surprise.

"Why, what's the matter, lass?" exclaimed James Redmayne, staring at her.

"I was only looking at the picture," she said. "It's so like——"

"So like what?"

"Like Mr. Walgrave, uncle."

On which, of course, they all turned and stared at the bar-rister, who was sitting on the edge of the great oak table, looking about him listlessly.

The portrait of Sir John Clevedon represented a man with close-cut dark hair, clustering in short crisp curls about a high and somewhat bald forehead. Eyes of a luminous gray, darkened by the darkness of the lashes, and the strongly-marked brows above them. The nose was a short aquiline with well-cut

nostrils; and the nose and eyebrows together gave a somewhat sinister look to a face which would otherwise have been supremely handsome. Nor was the face distinguished by physical beauty only: it was impossible to doubt the mental power of the man to whom it had belonged.

Mr. Walgrave raised his eyes, and looked steadily at the picture. Yes, there was a likeness, certainly—vague and shadowy—a likeness of expression rather than of feature, although even in feature there was some resemblance. The eyes were the same colour, and had something of the same light in them. The short dark hair grew in the same form upon the thoughtful forehead. As the living man looked up at the picture of the dead one, the faces seemed to grow more alike. One could fancy some subtle spiritual link between the two.

"Upon my word, I feel vastly flattered by the suggestion," said Mr. Walgrave coolly. "A man who disputed the palm with that handsome scoundrel Robert Carr is a person one must needs be proud to resemble, if ever so slightly. But I fancy the likeness exists only in your poetic imagination, Miss Redmayne."

"Not a bit of it," cried uncle James. "I'm blest if you ain't like him!"

"Then the gentleman must be like my old master, Sir Lucas, into the bargain," said Tristram Moles. "Sir Lucas was a true Clevedon. My poor old eyes are too dim to see such things very clear; but if the gentleman's like one, he must be like the other."

Mr. Wort turned upon his heel rather impatiently.

"We'd better not waste all our time dawdling here, if we're going to see the house," he said. Upon which they walked on into the great dining-hall, with its open gothic roof, where a couple of hundred people could dine at their ease; through billiard-room and music-room, morning-room and ball-room; and then back through a line of smaller rooms, looking out upon a Dutch garden, to the hall and the grand staircase, up which they went, startling the echoes with the clangour of their footsteps upon the uncarpeted stone.

Upstairs there were state bed-chambers, with tall plumed bedsteads, tapestry hangings, and a general aspect of uninhabitable-ness; and there were other rooms, in which the furniture was of a more modern date; but upon all the stamp of decay was more or less visible. There was no dirt or slovenliness. Mrs. Moles and her handmaiden worked indefatigably to keep things as well as they could be kept; but the water had come in here, and the paperhanging had fallen down there; and there was in one room a cracked panel, and in another a broken window. Everything that could fade had faded; everything

that could rot had rotted; yet the house had been originally so splendid, that it was splendid even in decay.

It happened somehow that Mr. Walgrave and Grace were generally together during this exploration. It happened so; there was no appearance of effort on the part of either to secure such a result. Mr. and Mrs. Redmayne had a good deal to say to the old butler, who was eager for gossip from the outer world of Kingsbury; and these three lingered to talk here and there, while Mr. Wort looked about him, thoughtfully contemplating the progress of decay and dilapidation. When they had seen all the rooms—the dingy old pictures, the curious old china, the nicknacks and pretty trifles which many a vanished hand had been wont to touch tenderly in a time long gone—Grace and her companion came to a standstill in the room over the chief entrance, the room with that great oriel window, which was one of the most striking features in the front of the house. It was the prettiest, brightest chamber upon this upper floor—a sitting-room, furnished almost entirely with Indian furniture—curiously carved ebony chairs, sandal-wood cabinets, card racks and caskets in ivory and silver, great jars filled with dried rose-leaves and spices, still faintly odorous.

“Isn’t it a darling room?” cried Grace rapturously, standing in the window with clasped hands, and her eyes wandering over the wide landscape, glorious in its summer splendour. “How delicious it must be to live with such a prospect as that always before one’s eyes! At Brierwood we are down in a hollow, and never see anything but our own garden. This was Lady Clevedon’s room; not the last Lady Clevedon—she never came here, poor soul—but Sir Lucas’s mother. She was the daughter of an Indian general, who sent her all this furniture. There’s a miniature of Sir Lucas when he was a little boy over the mantelpiece,” she continued, going across the room to look at it. “What a funny little nankeen jacket, and what an enormous collar! Yes, there is certainly a likeness.”

“To whom?”

“To you. Don’t you remember what Mr. Moles said? If you were like Sir John Clevedon, you must be like Sir Lucas. And there is a likeness—about the eyes and the expression, I think.”

“Curious,” said Mr. Walgrave indifferently. “I suppose I ought to feel gratified by the discovery, these Clevedons appear to be such great people.”

“They are a very old family, Mr. Wort says, and were distinguished in the days of the Plantagenets. It was a pity Sir Lucas spent all his money, wasn’t it?”

“I daresay his son thinks so,” replied Mr. Walgrave coolly. “However, according to Wort’s account, the estate will clear

itself in a year or two, and Francis Clevedon may come and take up his abode here. Rather a lucky fellow, to find himself master of such a place as this at thirty years of age. A man who owns such a house need take no trouble to distinguish himself. His estate is his distinction."

"Would you like to be the owner of it?" Grace asked smiling at his earnestness.

"Very much. I would give a great deal to be independent of the world, Grace—not to be obliged to tread a road marked out for me ever so long ago; not to be bent body and soul upon reaching one particular point. I never knew how hard it was to have my own fortune to make—not to be a free agent, in fact—until—until these last few days."

The girl looked at him wonderingly, her face very pale.

"Why in these last few days?" she asked.

"Because within that time I have made a fatal discovery, Grace."

"What discovery?"

"That I love you."

She looked at him for a moment, half incredulously, and then burst into tears.

He put his arm round her, clasped her to his breast, looking down upon her fondly, but with none of the triumph of a happy lover.

"My dearest, my sweetest, don't cry. I am not worth one of those tears. The secret is out, darling. I never meant to tell you. I hold you in my arms for a moment, for the first time last time. I don't even kiss you, you see. I love you with all my heart and soul, Grace Redmayne, and—I am engaged to marry another woman. I tell you both facts in a breath. All my future depends on the marriage; and I am not unworldly enough to say, Let my future go."

Grace disengaged herself gently from his encircling arms, her whole face beaming. He loved her. After that the deluge. What did it matter to her, just in that one triumphant moment, that he was pledged to marry another woman and break her heart? To know that he loved her was in itself so sweet, there was no room in her mind for a sorrowful thought.

"You don't wish me to marry a farmer?" she said, smiling at him.

"God forbid that you should, my darling! I should like you to stand for ever apart from common clay, a 'bright particular star.' I must go my way, and live my life; that is written amongst the immutabilities. But it would be some consolation for me to think of Grace Redmayne as something above the vulgar world in which I lived."

Consolation for him! He did not even think of whether *she* might or might not have need of consolation. And yet he knew.

that she loved him: had suspected as much for some little time, indeed. He thought that he had acted in a remarkably honourable manner in telling her the true state of the case with such perfect frankness. There were very few men in his position would have done as much, he told himself.

The door had been half open all this time, and the approaching footsteps and voices of the rest of the party now made themselves audible. Grace brushed away the traces of her tears, and went to the window to gain a little time before she faced her relations.

Mr. Walgrave followed her, and opened one of the casements, and made some remark about the landscape to cover her confusion.

"Well, now we've seen all the house, I suppose it's pretty nigh time to think of a bit of grub. Where are we going to have our dinners, Mr. Walgrave?" asked James Redmayne "In the gardens, or in the park?"

"In neither, Mr. Redmayne," answered the barrister. "We are going to imagine ourselves genuine Clevedons, and dine in the great hall."

"Eh! Well, that is a rum start. I thought you'd have been for spreading the table-cloth on the grass in a rural way; but I don't suppose Mr. Moles here will have any objection."

"Not in the least, Mr. Redmayne. You can make as free as you please in the dining-hall; any one as Mr. Wort brings is kindly welcome; and me and my wife can get you anything you may want."

"We've brought everything," said aunt Hannah proudly. "I packed the baskets with my own hands."

"Then me and my wife can wait upon you, Mrs. Redmayne, all the same," replied the butler.

They all went downstairs: aunt Hannah and Mr. Moles leading the way, discoursing confidentially about the baskets; Mr. Wort and Mr. Redmayne following, talking agriculture; Grace and the barrister last of all.

"Let us have one happy day together, Grace," he said, as they went slowly down the grand stair-case. "Let us forget there is any such thing as the future, and be utterly happy for to-day."

"I cannot help being happy when I am with you," she answered softly, too innocent to consider the peril of owning her love so frankly.

CHAPTER VII.

"IF IT COULD ALWAYS BE TO-DAY!"

THERE was a small oval table at the end of the dining-hall—small, that is to say, in comparison with the long banqueting

tables on each side of the hall, but capable of accommodating twelve or fourteen people, a table at which the Prince Regent had dined with a chosen few when all the county was assembled to do him honour—and it was this board which Mr. Walgrave insisted upon spreading with the contents of Mrs. Redmayne's baskets. He helped to lay the cloth himself, handing Grace the glasses and knives and forks as dextrously as if he had been a professional waiter accustomed to earn his three half-crowns nightly.

"We are used to picnicking, in chambers," he said. "I always help to lay the cloth when I have fellows to breakfast or dine with me. What a banquet you have brought, Mrs. Redmayne! I suggested a joint and a salad, and you have prepared an aldermanic feast—pigeon pie, corned beef, chicken in savory jelly, and—O, pray inform me, what is this sloppy compound in a stone jar? Are we to return to the days of our infancy, and eat curds-and-whey?"

"That's a junket, Mr. Walgry," replied aunt Hannah, with rather an offended air. "It wasn't an easy thing to bring. I can tell you; but I think it has come all right. My mother was a West-countrywoman, and taught me to make junkets. They're reckoned a dainty by most people."

"Rely upon it, I shall not be backward in my appreciation of the junket, Mrs. Redmayne. Now, Grace, you are to sit at the top of the table and be Lady Clevedon, and I shall take my place at the bottom as Sir Hubert. Mr. Wort, you will take the right of her ladyship; Mrs. Redmayne, I must have you by my side; and the rest anywhere."

The two young men had come in from their ramble by this time, and the whole party, except one, fell to with hearty appetite, and made havoc of the pigeon-pie and boiled beef, savory jelly, and other kickshaws, in the way of salad, cucumber, &c.; while Mr. Moles the butler waited upon them with as stately an air as if he had been presiding at the head of an army of serving-men at one of the princely banquets of days gone by. He permitted himself a quiet smile once or twice at some facetious remark of Mr. Walgrave's, but was for the most part the very genius of gravity, pouring out the Brierwood cider, and the sherry contributed by Mr. Walgrave, with as much dignity as if those liquors had been cabinet hocks or madeiras of priceless worth.

It was a merry meal. The barrister seemed as light-hearted as if his fame and fortune were made, and he had nothing more to do in life than to enjoy himself. Not always does Apollo strain his bow, and to-day the string hung loose, and Apollo abandoned himself heart and soul to happy idleness. He talked all through the meal, rattling on in very exuberance of spirits,

while the two lads, who had some dim sense of humour, laughed vociferously ever and anon in the intervals of their serious labour; and Grace, in her post of honour at the top of the table smiled and sparkled like a fountain in the sunshine. She had no need to say anything. It was enough for her to look so joyous and beautiful. Perhaps any blackbird in the Clevedon woods might have eaten as much as Miss Redmayne consumed that day; but it is only when every spiritual joy has vanished from a human soul that the pleasures of the table come to be pleasures, and the food which Grace ate that day was not grown on earthly soil. She was in fairy-land, and had about as much consciousness of the common things of this world as Titania when she caressed her loutish lover.

They were nearly two hours in the dining-hall, two hours which appeared to Grace just one brief half hour of perfect happiness, a vague dreamy joy which almost confused her senses; and then they went out into the gardens.

At Clevedon the gardens covered some eight acres, and were the chief glory of the place. Sorely neglected now, a very wilderness of rose and syringa, honeysuckle and clematis, moss-grown paths, arched alleys, where the foliage grew in tangled masses, passion-flower and virginia creeper choking each other in their wild luxuriance; here a fallen statue, there an empty marble basin, which had once been a fountain; at one end of an alley a wide pond half hidden by water-lilies; at another a broad stretch of bowling-green, bounded by a dense holly-hedge. The grass was cut now and then, and that one Italian flower-garden which had belonged to Lady Clevedon was kept in tolerable order, and that was all. The rest was chaos.

"I think if I were a millionaire, I would have at least one garden kept just in this condition," said Mr. Walgrave as they wandered among the straggling rose-bushes, caught every now and then by some trailing branch that lay across their path; "a garden in which the flowers should grow just as they liked, should degenerate and become mere weeds again if they pleased. I always fancy that bower of roses by Bendemeer's stream some wild neglected place like this. There are lovelinesses of form and colour in these rank masses of foliage which no gardener's art could ever produce."

Of course Grace agreed with him. She thought every word that fell from his lips a pearl of price.

They found a delightful green arbour, spacious and cool, and tolerably free from spiders, where uncle James and Mr. Wors could smoke their after-dinner pipes and sip the milk-punch in which pleasant retreat they invited Mr. Moles the butler to join them for a friendly half hour. It was not to be supposed, however, that Mr. Walgrave would hob and nob with a butler

and Mrs. Redmayne was in no manner surprised when, after just tasting the punch, he strolled away with Grace and her cousins. The cousins soon fled from the humdrum beauty of the gardens, and went back to the woods, where there were wild creatures to chase and trees to climb; so Grace and Mr. Walgrave had the gardens all to themselves.

Perhaps in all Grace Redmayne's brief life that was the happiest day—a day of perfect unalloyed delight. No matter that her lover had only declared his love in one breath, to tell her in the next that there was an insurmountable barrier between them. The time must come by and by when the thought of that would be despair; but it was not so yet. He loved her. In that one sentence was concentrated all she could imagine of earthly bliss. She had thought of him as something so far away—she had given him all her heart in childish ignorance of the cost. Life had been very sweet to her of late merely because he was near her. Even while she supposed him indifferent, only courteous with a stranger's courtesy to a woman of lower rank than his own, to see his face and to hear his voice had been enough. What was it, then, to know that he loved her—that this one supreme, almost incredible hazard had befallen her? Of all the women who had worshipped him—and a girl of Grace's sentimental temper is apt to suppose that every woman who has ever beheld him must needs adore her idol—he had chosen her. Ineffable condescension! The poor little foolish heart fluttered still with the emotion of that overpowering moment when he uttered those sublime words, "Grace, I love you."

As for Mr. Walgrave himself, he too found that dreamy afternoon wandering in neglected fruit and flower gardens—now pausing to pluck a rose, now loitering to gather a little heap of white raspberries on a broad green fig-leaf—not by any means an unenjoyable business. There was a faint flavour of worry and vexation of spirit mingled in the cup of joy. Even among the roses, looking down at Grace Redmayne's sweet girlish face, the shadow of future trouble fell darkly across his path. It was all very well to be so happy for to-day; but to-morrow was very near—and how could he break with a girl who loved him like this? It would be an awful wrench for him, let it come when it might; and yet a week ago he had made very light of this rustic flirtation, and had told himself that he was the last man in the world to come to grief in such a manner. Pretty faces were not new to him. He had lived amongst attractive women—had been courted and petted by them ever since his professional prospects had begun to bud with promise of rich blossom in days to come.

"I told her the truth, at any rate," he said to himself, as he watched Grace's ardent face, on which the light of happiness shone supernal. "I'm very glad of that. What a dear little

confiding soul she is, with not a thought of the future—with not one selfish calculation in her mind—happy only to be loved! I wish I had held my tongue. I suppose I ought to leave Brierwood to-morrow. It's like sporting on the edge of a precipice. And yet——"

And yet he meant to stay, and did stay.

The afternoon lasted three hours. In the arbour, pipes and gossip, and punch, and soothing slumbers beguiled the elders into unconsciousness of the flight of time. It was only when a perceptible fading in the glory of the day, a mellower light, a cooler air, a gentle whispering of summer winds among the trees, warned them that evening had come unawares, that Mrs. Redmayne suddenly bestirred herself to see about tea. They must drink tea, of course, before they bent their way homewards. The day's festivities would be incomplete without a tea-drinking.

Happily there was not much for aunt Hannah to do, or the light would have scarcely lasted them. The lads had selected an eligible spot under a great Spanish chestnut in the woods, had collected firing, and lighted the fire and boiled the kettle. Everything was ready. "Mother" was only wanted to make and dispense the tea.

They followed the lads gaily through those delicious woods, where birds, which ought to have been nightingales if they were not, were warbling and jug-jugging divinely; followed to a fairy-like amphitheatre of greensward, shut in by tall limes and Spanish chestnuts, under the biggest of which the lads had spread their rustic tea-table, while the wood-fire smoked and smouldered a little way off.

Grace clapped her hands with delight.

"O, if we could always live here," she cried, "how sweet it would be!"

If we could always live here—if it could always be to-day, she thought; and then to her childish fancy it seemed that with the fading of that blissful day the end of all her happiness must come. For the first time she began to realise the actual state of the case; for the first time she felt the shadow of coming trouble—parting—tears—death; for could it be less than death to lose him?

They sat side by side under the chestnut. Aunt Hannah glanced at them sharply, but could see nothing suspicious in the manner of either. It was not strange that Mr. Walgrave should be polite to her niece, who really was a pretty girl, and fifteen years his junior. There could hardly be any danger.

It was a pleasant, innocent, rustic tea-drinking—the two young men and their father consuming innumerable cups of tea, and eating bread-and-butter with an air of having fasted for the last twenty-four hours. That chasing of tender young beast-

lings of the squirrel tribe had given the lads an alarming appetite. There were shrimps in abundance—pretty pink young things, which looked as if one might have strung them into coral necklaces—shrimps and plum-cake. The young Redmaynes were ready for anything. They were noisy too in their exuberance, and were altogether so boisterous in their mirth, that Hubert Walgrave and his companion had plenty of time for low sweet converse, unheard and unobserved. Grace brightened again as her lover talked to her, and again forgot that life was not bounded by to-day—forgot everything except that she was with him.

The twilight was darkening into night when the crockeryware was all packed and the party ready. Mr. Walgrave and Grace had strolled a little way in advance while the packing was in progress—hardly out of sight, not at all out of hearing. Aunt Hannah could catch a glimpse of her niece's light muslin dress glimmering between the trees every now and then—could hear her happy laugh. They were just gathering themselves together to follow, when a piercing scream rang through the wood.

"Lord have mercy upon us, what's that?" cried Mrs. James.

"'Twas Grace's voice, surely. Run and see, Charley."

Both young men sped off, and one of them ran against Mr. Walgrave, who came towards them with Grace in his arms, her head lying helplessly on his shoulder, her face ghastly white.

"She has fainted," he said. "I never saw any one so frightened. We sat down upon a felled tree yonder for a minute waiting for you, and a viper—I think it must have been—shot out of the grass between us and ran across her dress. It was her surprise, I suppose, that overcame her."

He laid her gently down upon the grass, with her head upon her aunt's lap. They all looked more frightened than the occasion seemed to warrant.

"It's only a faint," Mr. Walgrave said, reassuringly. "Lay her flat upon the grass, and she'll come round quickly enough. Run for some water, Charley, there's a good fellow."

He was kneeling by the girl's side, with one little cold hand in his. Her face was still deadly pale—almost livid; and aunt Hannah was looking at it with an anxious countenance.

"It isn't as if it was any one else," she said, chafing the girl's disengaged hand. "Fainting is no great matter for most folks; but it isn't easy to bring her round. She went off just like this the day her father went away, and gave us all a fine turn. I thought she was gone. It's her heart, you see."

"Her heart!" cried Mr. Walgrave, aghast. "What's the matter with her heart?"

He laid his hand upon the girl's breast with an alarmed look.

"I'm afraid there's something wrong. Her mother died of

heart-complaint, you know—went in-doors one summer evening to fetch her needlework, and dropped down dead at the foot of the stairs. The heart had stopped beating all in a moment, the doctor said; and the same doctor has told me that Grace isn't a long-lived woman—she's too much like her mother."

There was a faint fluttering under his hand. Thank God for that! The heart that loved him so fondly, so foolishly, had not ceased to beat. But Mr. Walgrave had experienced a smart shock notwithstanding; and when Grace opened her eyes presently, and looked up at him, his face was almost as pale as her own.

She drew a long shuddering breath, drank a few spoonfuls of water, and declared herself quite well, and then rose with tremulous limbs, and looked round her, smiling faintly.

"I'm afraid I've given you all a great deal of trouble," she said. "It was very foolish of me; but the sight of that horrid creature frightened me so. It didn't sting anyone, did it?" she asked nervously, looking at Hubert Walgrave.

"No, Grace; there has been no harm done," he answered, with a cheering smile, though his face was still white. "The beast was only a little innocent worm. I could not have believed you would behave so like a fine lady."

"It was a viper," cried Grace. "Vipers have stung people to death in this country. And he darted out just between us, as if—as if——"

She faltered, and stopped; but Hubert Walgrave knew very well what she would have said: "as if he came to part us."

"Take my arm, Miss Redmayne," he said, in his easiest way; "and don't alarm yourself about vipers. I hold them very harmless, unless they take the biped form. Do you feel equal to walking home at once, or would you like to rest a little?"

"I am not at all tired. I am quite ready to go."

And so they went arm-in-arm through the narrow pathways, brushing against the bearded barley and the feathery oats, and the fast-ripening wheat, all silvered by the summer moonbeams, and anon emerging upon some smooth stretch of meadow, where the new-grown grass was sweet, and where a clump of trees made an island of shadow here and there. They went home together, only a few yards in advance of the Brierwood party, and yet alone; and Grace forgot the viper.

CHAPTER VIII.

"RECAL HER TEARS, TO THEE AT PARTING GIVEN."

It was some time, however, before Mr. Walgrave forgot what he had heard in the wood about Grace's mother—that dark hint of

heart-disease. He took occasion to question Mrs. James next day upon the subject, and made himself fully acquainted with the details of Mrs. Richard Redmayne's death, and what the doctor had said about Grace. He had made no examination, it appeared; no stethoscope had ever sounded the innocent young heart; but he had remarked to Mrs. James once, confidentially, that there was something about her niece's appearance he hardly liked, and that it would not surprise him if her constitution should develop the same tendency that had been fatal to her mother. This had been said while Richard Redmayne was in England; and his sister-in-law had not cared to alarm either him or her niece by any hint of what the doctor had said.

"If it was heart-disease, you see," said Mrs. James, "there'd be no cure for it; and if it wasn't, it would have been cruel to upset poor Rick in the midst of his troubles, which was coming pretty fast upon him just then; so I thought the wisest thing I could do was to hold my tongue."

"Quite right, Mrs. Redmayne. No doubt the doctor wanted job. Your medical men can have very little to do in this pure atmosphere. A chronic case, rich farmer's only child, and so on. Heart-disease! No; I don't for a moment believe that your niece Grace has anything amiss with her heart. At her age the very idea seems preposterous."

"Well it do, Mr. Walgry—don't it? But her mother was only seven-and-twenty when she died. They're not a long-lived family, any of the Norbitts; and Grace's mother was a Norbitt."

Mr. Walgrave persisted in making light of the matter. He would not permit himself to think that anything so bright and sweet as Grace Redmayne was doomed to vanish suddenly and untimely from this earth. He pooh-poohed the country surgeon's opinion, and very speedily contrived to get rid of any uneasiness which the subject might have caused him.

An event occurred to divert his attention in some manner a few days after the picnic. He had more than half made up his mind to leave Brierwood, and go abroad somewhere for the rest of the long vacation. He could not quite snut his eyes to the peril of remaining where he was. He had recovered his strength—was almost as well as ever he had been, in fact. In every way it would be best and wisest for him to go.

He began to pack his portmanteau one night, took out his *Bradshaw*, and made a profound study of the continental routes. Why should he not spend his autumn abroad? There was Spain, for instance. He had an intense desire to see Spain, from the Escorial to the Alhambra. Yet to-night, somehow, the vision of dark-eyed damsels and bull-fights had scarcely any charm for his imagination. He flung the railway-guide into a distant corner with an impatient sigh.

"Why should I run away from her when I love her so dearly?" he said to himself. "Cannot a man live two lives—give his outward seeming and all the labour of his brain to the world, and keep his heart in some safe shelter, hidden away from the crowd? Other men have done it; why should not I? Is there a man upon earth who would throw away such a treasure as that girl?"

And then Mr. Walgrave fell into a profound meditation, and went to bed at last in the gray morning to spend three mortal hours tossing to and fro, tormented by the most perplexing thoughts that had ever wearied his brain. He was trying to reconcile things that were irreconcilable. His future life had been planned long ago—judiciously, he believed. He did not mean that anything should alter those plans. Whatever new element might arise must be made subservient to those. He was not a man to turn aside from the path which he had cut for himself—a high-road to fame and fortune—for any consideration whatever. He meant to renounce nothing.

But—but if he could hold fast by all he valued so highly, and yet win that other prize—that sweeter, nearer delight? Fame and fortune must come in the future—he would do nothing to forfeit the certainty of those. But why should he not snatch this other joy in the present, and let the future, so far as it concerned Grace Redmayne, take care of itself? If that croaking country surgeon's opinion were indeed correct, and the poor child were not destined to live long, so much the easier would it be to provide for the happiness and security of her future. There was no sacrifice, short of that entire sacrifice of his own prospects, which he would not make for her. And so his thoughts rambled on, shaping first one scheme and then another, only to abandon them. And when he got up in the morning, he said to himself resolutely,—

"I will make it the business of my life to forget her. A man who takes such a step as that I have been dreaming of always wrecks himself. Sooner or later his folly comes home to him. I have gone through life without a single error of that kind. It would be madness to begin now."

He went downstairs, and sauntered out into the garden. It was still early. All the pleasant bustle of farmhouse life was at its height in dairy and outhouses and kitchen. Grace, with a basket on her arm and a pair of scissors in her hand, was clipping and trimming the roses near the house, fair as Tennyson's famous gardener's daughter when first her lover saw her in the porch.

The vivid blush, lighting up the fair pale face, the sudden look of pleased surprise—how sweet they were!

"And I am going to surrender all this," Mr. Walgrave thought

with a sharp pang. He had quite made up his mind to go away by this time; but he could not make up his mind to tell her his intention. Better to put off that until the very last moment, and then with one desperate wrench tear himself away.

They strolled round the garden, Grace clipping the roses as she went, not quite so neatly as she would have clipped them without that companionship. The hands fluttered a little among the leaves as they did their work. He was talking to her; those unfathomable gray eyes were watching her. He had never spoken of his love since that day at Clevedon; had said scarcely a word which her uncle and aunt might not have heard; but he had lost no opportunity of being with her; and she had been almost completely happy. She did not forget what he had told her. He was engaged to marry another woman. He would go away by and by, and her life would be desolate; but she only looked forward to this desolation with a vague terror. She could not be unhappy while he was near her.

They wasted about an hour in the garden. Grace had breakfasted half an hour ago, early as it was. Mr. Walgrave's breakfast was waiting for him in the cool airy parlour. He went slowly back to the house at last, still with Grace by his side. Aunt Hannah was up to her eyes in dairy work at this time of the day. There was no one to observe them. They were talking of the books Grace had been reading lately—books which opened a new world to her—and her brightness and intelligence delighted her lover.

"If all Miss Toulmin's pupils are anything like you, Grace, I shall certainly make a point of sending my daughters to her some day," he said, lightly.

She looked at him for a moment, and then grew very pale. His daughters! He was talking of a time when he should be married to that other woman—when she would have passed out of his life altogether. That careless speech of his had brought the fact sharply home to her. He was nothing, never could be anything, to her.

"You will have forgotten my existence by the time your daughters are old enough to go to school," she said.

"Forgotten you, Grace? Never! Fate rules our lives, but not our hearts. I shall never forget you, Grace. I behaved very badly the other day, when I told you the impression you had made upon me. It was an offence against you—and some one else. But I think that you, at least, have forgiven me."

He spoke as lightly as he could, like a man of the world, but was very far from feeling lightly. Grace was silent. That common-sense tone of apology cut her to the quick. She scarcely knew what she had hoped or dreamed within the last few days; but they had been so happy together, that the image

of her unknown rival, the woman he was destined to marry, had seemed very vague and unreal.

"I have nothing to forgive," she said coldly. "It is for—the other person to be angry."

"The other person would be very angry, no doubt, if I were to make a full confession of my sins; but I don't mean to do so, believe me. The other person will go down to her grave in ignorance of the truth. But I want to be assured of your forgiveness, Grace. Just raise those sweet eyes of yours, and say, 'I forgive you for having loved me too well.'"

Grace smiled—a bitter smile.

"So well, that you—that you will go away and marry some one else," she said, the practical phase of the situation coming home to her with that first pang of jealousy.

"My dearest girl," cried Mr. Walgrave, who had by no means desired the conversation to take this turn, "there are very few men in this world who can choose their own road in life. Mine was chosen for me long ago. I am not my own master; if I were——"

"If you were," repeated Grace, with a sudden desperate courage, that was as much a surprise to herself as it was to him—"if you were, would you marry a farmer's daughter?"

"If I were the master of Clevedon, Grace—if I had five thousand a year—yes. But I have my own way to make in the world, and I am weak enough to value success. I am engaged to marry a woman whose fortune will help me to win a position, and to maintain it. That is as much as to say, I am going to sell myself, isn't it?"

"It sounds rather like that."

"Men do it every day, Grace—quite as often as women; and the thing answers fairly enough in ten cases out of twenty. I daresay I shall make a very tolerable average kind of husband. I shall not spend all my wife's money, and I shall go to dinner-parties with her. I think I can give her almost as much heart as she will give me; and yet, Grace, I never loved but one woman upon this earth, and her name is Grace Redmayne."

The girl was silent. He was cruel, he was base; and yet it was still sweet to her to be told that he loved her. With all his heart and soul she believed him.

"I never meant that our talk should take this turn," Hubert Walgrave went on, after a rather lengthened pause. "I meant only to bid you good-bye, and go away without one dangerous word."

She looked up at him with sudden terror in her face.

"You are going away!" she exclaimed. "Soon?"

"Very soon; to-day, in fact, if possible. What should I do here? The wretch must come, Grace. The sooner the better."

She tried to answer him, but her lips only trembled, and she began to cry. All the eloquence that ever poured from the lips of a woman exalted by passion would not have touched him so keenly as that mute look—those childish tears. It was little more than a child's unreasoning love that she gave him, perhaps, but it was so pure and perfect of its kind!

They had turned away from the house, instinctively avoiding it as their conversation grew more tender, and were walking slowly towards the orchard, slowly out of human ken. Mr. Walgrave drew his arm round the girl's waist, comforting her—drew her close to him, until the graceful head sank on his shoulder. Never had so fair a head rested there before. He bent down and kissed the pure young brow.

This was the manner in which he began to forget her.

"My dearest, my sweetest!" he said pleadingly, "your tears go to my heart of hearts. I am so anxious to do what is wise, what is right. Upon my soul, Grace, I believe that I could bring myself to forego all question of worldly advantage"—he did fancy for the moment that this was so—"if—if my honour were not involved in this marriage which I speak of. But it is, darling; it is quite too late for me to recede from my engagement. I should be the vilest of defaulters if I did. Let us be reasonable then, my sweet one. I wish to do what is best for you, for both of us. Don't you think that it would be wisest for me to go away?"

"I don't know whether it would be wise or foolish," she sobbed, with her head still upon his shoulder; "but I think my heart will break if you go."

He drew her a little closer to him. Great heavens, why had he not five thousand a year, and a right to marry this village maiden? It seemed to him a very hard thing that he was not able to win this wayside flower, and yet keep all the other advantages he valued so highly.

"But remember, dearest," he said, trying his uttermost to be worldly and practical, "it is at best only a question of a week or so, more or less. It is very sweet to me to be with you. I doubt if I ever felt what real happiness was before I knew you; but I cannot linger in this happy valley for ever. The time of parting *must* come at last, and will seem the harder for every hour we spend together. Would it not be wiser to part at once? Say yes, Grace, for both our sakes."

"I can't. I can't be glad for you to go away. If you are really happy here, why should you be so anxious to go? I know that I can never be any more to you than I am now—that you must go away at last—to that—other person——"

"And yet you would rather have me stay?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Very well, then, I stay; but it is at your request, remember Grace; and when the time *does* come for our parting, you will be reasonable. We will bury our love in a deep, deep grave, and you will forget that you ever knew me."

"We will bury our love," the girl answered softly.

After this, Mr. Walgrave went slowly in to breakfast, with very little appetite, and with a vague sense of having made a fool of himself, after all. All those tossings to and fro—those schemes made and unmade—that final resolve on the side of prudence—had come to nothing. He was going to remain.

"Heaven help any man of five-and-thirty who has the ill-luck to win the heart of a girl of nineteen!" he said to himself. "Sweet Grace Redmayne, what a child she is!"

Grace went into the parlour with her basket only a quarter full of withered roses—there were plenty of faded flowers left to perish on the trees. The door of the passage that led to the kitchen was open, and she could hear a confusion of tongues, and her aunt's voice protesting about the awkwardness of something.

"It couldn't have fell out awkwarder," cried Mrs. James; "a good two months before we'd any right to expect it; and all my arrangements made, even down to the weekly washing. I'm sure I'd thought of everything, and planned everything, and nothing could have been straighter than it all would have been, if the baby had come to its time."

Grace listened wonderingly, but had no occasion to wonder long. Mrs. James bounced into the parlour.

"What *do* you think, *Grace*? Priscilla Sprouter's baby was born last night."

Priscilla was the married daughter, united to a prosperous young grocer in the small town of Chickfield, Sussex, about thirty miles from Brierwood. This unarithmetical infant, which had arrived before it was due, was Mrs. James Redmayne's second grandchild; and Mrs. James had solemnly pledged herself to pay a fortnight's visit to Chickfield whenever the event should take place, in order to attend to the general welfare of her daughter's person and household. The usual nurse would be engaged, of course; but Mrs. James was a power paramount over that hireling.

The interesting event, however, was to have occurred in October, and all Mrs. James's arrangements were made accordingly: a reliable matron engaged to take the helm at Brierwood during her absence; a fortnight's suspension of those more solemn duties of brewing and preserving, which could not be performed without being duly provided for; and behold, here was a special messenger, mounted on a sturdy unkempt pony in the butcher interest, come with a letter announcing the untimely advent of a fine boy.

"Fine, indeed!" cried aunty Hannah, contemptuously. "And please will I come at once; for father—that's William Sprouter—is so uneasy?"

"I suppose you must go, aunt," said Grace, dubiously.

"You suppose I must, do you? And a sieve and a half of Orleans plums in the back kitchen. Who do you suppose is to look after *them*?"

"Couldn't Mrs. Bush make the jam, aunt, if you must go?"

"Of course Mrs. Bush could. Every one that can put a saucepan on the fire will tell you they can make jam; and nice slop it will be—a couple of inches deep in blue mould before it's been made a month. No, Grace, I am not the woman to treat your father's property like that. I shall make the jam, if I drop; and I suppose I must start off to Chickfield as soon as it's made. And I should like to know who's to see after Mr. Walgry's dinners when I'm gone."

"Couldn't I manage that, aunt Hannah? I don't think Mr. Walgrave is very particular about his dinners."

"Not particular; no, of course not: as long as everything is done to a turn, a man seems easy enough to please; but just try him with a shoulder of lamb half-raw, or a slice of salmon boiled to a mash, and then see what he'll say. However, I must go to Priscilla for a few days, at any rate, and things must take their chance here. I've sent Jack across to tell Mrs. Bush she must come directly; and I do hope, Grace, you'll show a little steadiness for once in a way, and see that your father's goods ain't wasted. If Mr. Walgry wasn't a very quiet kind of gentleman, I shouldn't care about leaving you; but he isn't like the common run of single men—there's no nonsense about *him*."

Grace blushed fiery red, and had to turn suddenly to the window to hide her face. Mrs. James was too busy to perceive her confusion, skirmishing about the room, peering into a great roomy store-cupboard in a corner by the fireplace, filling the tea-caddy, and the sugar-canister, calculating how much colonial produce ought to be consumed during her absence.

"You'll give Mrs. Bush a quarter of a pound of tea and half a pound of sugar for the week, remember, Grace—not a grain more. And don't be letting them have butcher's meat in the kitchen more than twice a week. If they can't eat good wholesome bacon they must go without. Sarah knows the kind of dinners I get for Mr. Walgry; and Mrs. Bush is to cook for him. But be sure you see to everything with your own eyes, and give your orders to the butcher with your own lips. The broad-beans are to be eaten, mind, without any fuss about likes or dislikes: your uncle didn't sow them for the crows. And don't be giving all the damsons to Jack and Charley in puddings. I shall want to make damson cheese when I come back: and if

they want to make themselves ill in their insides, there's plenty of windfalls that's good enough for *that*. And I should like to see those linen pillow-cases darned neatly when I come home. Miss Toulmin had a deal better have learnt you to mend house-linen than to *parley-vous Français*. I'm sure anything I give you to darn hangs about till I'm sick of the sight of it."

"I'll do the best I can, aunt," said Grace, meekly. "Shall you be away long, do you think?"

"How can I tell, child? If Priscilla and the baby go on well, I shan't stop more than a week at the outside. But she's a delicate young woman, and there's no knowing what turn things may take. I shan't stop longer than I can help, you may take my word for that. And now I'm going into the best parlour to tell Mr. Walgry."

Grace sat down by the open window, fluttered strangely by this small domestic business. Her aunt would be away—the scrutiny of those sharp eyes removed from her; a week of almost perfect freedom before her—she could not help thinking that in her aunt's absence she would see more of the man she loved. She knew that he had been obliged to diplomatisé a good deal in order to spend half an hour with her, now and then, without creating suspicion. It would be different now. For one happy week they might meet without restraint. And then—and then the end of all things would come, and they must part. That bitter parting must come sooner or later; he had told her so in sober seriousness. She tried very hard to realise the fact, but could not. She was too much a child; and a week seemed almost an eternity of happiness.

"Will he be glad?" she said to herself. "O, I wonder if he will be glad." If she could have looked into her lover's heart after he heard Mrs. Redmayne's announcement, she would have discovered that he was not glad.

"I wish I had gone away this morning, without any leave taking," he thought; "to go now, when she has asked me to stay, would seem sheer brutality. And to stay, now that the dragon is going away, and we can be together all day long, is only heaping up misery for the future. I did not believe myself capable of being made unhappy by any woman; but it will be a hard struggle to forget this farmer's daughter. I wish I had never seen her. I wish I had never taken it into my head to come here. Pshaw! am I the kind of man to make a trouble out of any such sentimental absurdity as this? Why shouldn't I enjoy a week's innocent flirtation with a pretty girl, and then go back to my own world and forget her?"

And with this laudable intention Mr. Walgrave strolled out into the garden again, in the hope of meeting Grace.

He was disappointed, however, this time. Mrs. James was up to her eyes in preserving, and kept Grace in the kitchen with her, listening to solemn counsel upon all the details of domestic management. It was rather a hard thing to have to stop in the hot kitchen all through that lovely summer day, wiping out jam-pots, cutting and writing labels, and making herself useful in such small ways; but Grace bore the infliction very meekly. To-morrow there would be perfect liberty.

Mr. Walgrave prowled round the garden two or three times, then stretched himself at full length in the orchard, and slumbered for a little in the drowsy August noontide—a slumber in which his dreams were not pleasant—awoke unrefreshed, went back to the house and reconnoitred, caught a glimpse of Grace in the kitchen through a latticed window half-buried in ivy, lost his temper, and took up his fishing-rod and wandered out in search of an elderly and experienced pike he had been waging war with for the last six weeks; a wary, worldly-minded brute, who thought no more of swallowing a hook than if it had been a sugar-plum, and had acquired, by long usage, a depraved appetite for fishing-tackle.

CHAPTER IX.

“*AE FOND KISS, AND THEN WE SEVER.*”

It was late in the afternoon when Hubert Walgrave came back to the farm, and there was a holy calm in the atmosphere of the old house which told him somehow that Mrs. Redmayne had departed. Your household Martha is the most estimable of women, but is apt to make a good deal of superfluous clatter in her trouble about many things. There was an air of perfect peacefulness in the house to-day, which was new and welcome to the lodger. His dinner was served without the usual bustle—not quite so well cooked, perhaps, as when Mrs. James’s own hand basted the joint, or made the gravies and seasonings; but he was not a man to whom a well-cooked dinner is the supreme good of life. He liked the repose and tranquillity which Mrs. James had left behind her; liked to think that when he strolled into the garden presently he would find Grace free to give him her society.

He found her sitting at her work—those inexorable pillow-cases—quite alone under the cedar. James Redmayne was by no means a man of dissipated habits; but liberty is very sweet to those who taste it rarely; and he had snatched the opportunity of walking over to Kingsbury, to discuss the ruling topics of the day with the small politicians of the place in the comfortable parlour of the Moon and Seven Stars. Harvest was near.

and every man had a good deal to say about his crops. The burrs were beginning to show on the bine. What with politics and agriculture, Mr. Redmayne was in for a long evening. As to Jack and Charley, they never stayed anywhere except for meals. Their normal state was locomotion.

So Grace sat quite alone under the cedar; and all that evening the lovers roamed in the garden and loitered in the orchard, and there was no one to interfere with their happiness. O, halcyon time! O, summer-tide of joy, shadowed by no thought of to-morrow! Grace abandoned herself to her happiness as simply as a child at the beginning of a holiday. He was with her—he had granted her prayer, and stayed. Never had she dreamed that life could hold so much joy. And yet it was only the old story: passionate protestations of unchanging affection—a love which was vast enough for anything except self-sacrifice—a strange mixture of sentiment and worldly wisdom—a good deal of melancholy philosophising after the modern school—and the perpetual refrain, "I love you, Grace, but it is not to be."

One sweet summer day followed another, and their liberty was undisturbed. Uncle James made the best use of his freedom, contrived to have business at Tunbridge one day, and at Kingsbury the next, and had what the Yankees call "a good time." Grace went out fishing with her lover—went wandering along the winding bank of a delicious streamlet that twisted here and there through that not too-well watered country, and saw him do battle with the ancient pike, or capture an occasional barbel or half a dozen roach. A great deal of walking and talking went to a very little angling in these rambles. He cut her name upon the silver bark of an old beech, like any rustic Corydon. He could not help wondering what Augusta Vallory would have thought if she could have seen him engaged in that sentimental labour, with Grace watching him enraptured.

Well, it was a sweet life, if it could have lasted. He thought of his own world with a dreary sigh.

"And yet by the end of a month, I should be tired to death, I daresay," he said to himself. "How much better to break with my darling while our love retains all its freshness—to have each a sweet poetic memory to carry down to our graves! How much better not to have worn our emotions threadbare! I shall marry Augusta, and Grace will marry one of her cousins; and in the secret drawer of our desks we shall each keep a withered flower, or a lock of hair—'only a woman's hair'—in remembrance of a buried love."

This was very comfortable philosophy, and for the man of the world who meant to make a name and a fortune, and live the life which seemed to him altogether best worth living, highly

satisfactory—not quite so consolatory, perhaps, for the girl who had given him all her heart, and was to be left behind to vegetate with a farmer.

The days slipped away. The week was very near its end. Aunt Hannah wrote to inform her family that Priscilla Sprouter was going on admirably, and the baby in perfect health; and that, with the blessing of Providence, she, Mrs. James, would be home early on Monday morning—in time for the wash.

This was a signal for Hubert Walgrave's departure. He did not care to encounter the scrutinising gaze of the matron in his altered relations with Grace. The rustic idyl had lasted long enough. It was best that it should come to a sudden close. And yet—and yet—this man of the world counted the hours that were left to him before that black Monday, and looked forward with a foolish delight to the quiet of the long Sabbath—the church bells ringing hymn tunes across the golden corn-fields—the drowsy blissfulness of the old-fashioned garden, where flaunting hollyhocks proclaimed that autumn was at hand.

Grace woke with a strange tremulous feeling of mingled joy and sorrow on that Sunday morning. Another long day—with him! It was the last; but while it still lay before her it seemed such a sum of happiness. At twilight it would be different; but with the morning sun still shining she could not think of the evening. The garden was still bright and dewy when Hubert Walgrave came in quest of her, and she brighter and fresher than the morning itself. They walked together until breakfast-time—went to church together afterwards—were together, more or less, all day long. There was no one to interrupt their perpetual *tête-à-tête*, even upon this day of rest; Mr. Redmayne improving the shining hours by refreshing slumber, sleeping off the effects of his unwonted dissipations at Kingsbury, that he might meet his wife with a serene front on the morrow; the two young men loafing about anywhere and everywhere—sitting on gates for the greater part of the day—conversing with stray ploughmen, or descending to the intellectual level of a passing crow boy.

Halcyon Sabbath! happy summer time among the flaunting hollyhocks and fading roses! 'T was meet this should be the end. In all Grace Redmayne's young life this one bright week made up the sum of perfect happiness. In the fashionable world there are experienced beauties who count their happy seasons—summers that were one perpetual festival—who look back regretfully to the golden years in their calendar; but Grace's season was bound by the span of seven days. She had her brief day of delight and brightness, like a flower or a butterfly, and that was all.

Towards evening Hubert Walgrave saw her face change. She grew very pale; her hands trembled as they touched the flowers; and when, in the course of their purposeless sauntering to and fro, one little hand rested on his arm, he found that it was icy cold.

"My darling, is there anything the matter?" he asked tenderly.

"Nothing; except that you are going away to-morrow. You do not expect me to be very happy to-night, do you?"

"But, my sweetest, you have known from the first that it must be so. We agreed to make your aunt's return the signal for our leave-taking. This parting has been before us from the beginning."

"Yes, it has been before us; but I did not know it would be so bitter," she said, and then burst into tears.

It was hard for him to bear, but a man who means to get on in the world must endure a good deal of hardship in the way of outraged feeling. He would have given a great deal in that moment to be able to clasp her to his heart, and claim her for his fair young wife; a great deal, but not quite all. If he had been an unsuccessful man, with nothing to sacrifice, it would have been easy to forget any differences of social position, slight at the best, and to cast in his fate with the woman he loved. But he was very far from being an unsuccessful man, and his standpoint was a critical one. He owed much to one strong hand that had helped him to mount several rungs of the ladder, and could help him higher. To marry this girl would be to forfeit the best friend he had; in plain words, would be simply ruin. A judge may marry his cook; but a rising young barrister, dependent on the breath of attorneys, has an important card to play in his marriage, and may make or mar himself thereby. Hubert Walgrave did not mean to imperil his chances. He had begun his career when a young man fresh from college with the determination to make a name for himself. There were circumstances in his life that made this desire keener in him than it is in most men. Nor had he ever swerved by a hair's breadth from that intention. This luckless passion for a farmer's daughter was his first folly.

He comforted her as best he might, dried her tears, beguiled her into smiling at him, a very faint wan smile.

"Shall I ever see you again after to-morrow morning, I wonder?" she said piteously. And then she quoted *Romeo and Juliet*, which they had read together in the garden:

"O heaven, I have an ill-divining soul!
Methinks I see thee now I'm parting from thee,
As one dead in the bottom of a tomb."

"My dearest, we shall meet again. I shall come to see you one day,—when you are married perhaps."

"O no, no, no!" she cried, shaking her head.

"O yes, yes, yes, Gracey! This has been only a sweet poetic dream, this love of yours and mine. We are each to go our way in the world, and live our lives. You remember what your beloved Longfellow says:

" 'Life is real, life is earnest.' "

"And my sweet Grace will be an honoured wife and the happy mother of children. That is what a woman's life was meant for, after all, Grace, to watch beside a cradle. I shall come to see you, and find you the fair central figure of a happy home. Your father will have returned by that time."

The pale face whitened in the moonlight.

"My father!" the girl repeated with something like a shudder. "You have almost made me forget my father."

The morning came; rosy-fingered Aurora in her opal car, and Mrs. James Redmayne in a chaise-cart. She arrived at Brierwood about breakfast-time—a metropolitan breakfast-time, that is to say—having risen at a preternaturally early hour in order to do thirty miles and be at home in time for the washing. All the poetry of the cool shadowy old homestead seemed to vanish at the sight of her. There are people at whose coming all mystic creatures disperse; people who carry with them everywhere a delightful atmosphere of commonplace, whose conversation is as interesting as a rule-of-three sum, whose countenances are as expressive of tender emotion as the back of a ledger. Mrs. James was one of these.

She gave her niece a mechanical kiss, with her eyes exploring the corners of the room all the while to see if the solemn rite of cleaning had been duly performed in her absence; and finding nothing here to complain of, turned her scrutinising gaze upon the girl's face, and pronounced immediately that she was looking "bilious."

"You've been lolling about in-doors all day, I daresay," she remarked, "instead of taking a healthy walk every morning."

"No indeed, aunt Hannah," protested Grace, blushing; "I've been out a good deal—for long walks."

"O, you have, have you?" said her aunt; "and pray are those pillow-cases mended yet?"

"I've—almost—finished them."

"Almost! You've never done more than almost finish any work I ever gave you to do. But that comes of sending girls to stuck-up boarding-schools. I've no common patience with such trumpery."

"Is the baby a very nice one, aunt Hannah?" Grace inquired

meekly, in the hope of giving a pleasant turn to the conversation.

"He's got the red-gum," Mrs. James answered sharply; "I don't believe I ever saw a child so speckled."

"But he'll come right, I suppose, aunt?"

"O, he'll come right soon enough, I daresay; but as for your monthly nurses, of all the lazy lumber I ever had to do with, they're about the worst. If children could only be brought up to the month by machinery, so as to get rid of *them*, it would be a blessing to families. How's Mr. Walgry?"

"He's very well, aunt Hannah. Uncle James told you in his letter that he was going away, didn't he?"

"Well, yes, he said something about it; but it was as much as I could do to make top or tail of it. Your uncle's a poor scribe. When is he going?"

"To-day," faltered Grace, dragging one of the ill-fated pillow-cases out of her work-basket, and studying a darn.

"To-day! That's uncommonly sudden. However, he's a good paymaster, and free to go when he likes. If one must take a lodger, one couldn't have one that would give less trouble. And we've made a fair profit out of him. I shall put from ten to fifteen pound in the savings-bank for your father out of what he's paid me."

Mrs. James took off her bonnet, washed her face at a sink in the back kitchen with the strongest yellow soap, and a most profound indifference to the effect of such ablutions on her complexion, put on a clean cap, and then went to pay her respects to the departing lodger. His portmanteau and carpet-bag had been brought down into the old-fashioned low-ceilinged lobby, which served as a hall; the Kingsbury fly was at the door. Grace stood at the parlour-window, pale as a ghost, watching. Would he seek her out to say good-bye? or would he leave her without a word? The eyes of the world were on him now—would he play his cruel part coldly, and without heed of her anguish?

She heard his voice in the lobby, talking commonplace to her aunt, and listened as if every word had been inspiration.

"So sorry to leave you, Mrs. Redmayne," he said, in his slow languid way. "I did not believe I could have enjoyed country life so much. I have to thank you a thousand times for all your attention; nothing but an actual necessity to perform other engagements would induce me to leave you. I hope to be allowed to come again some day."

"We shall be pleased to see you anywhen, Mr. Walgry," replied Mrs. James, in her blandest tones. "I'm sure there never was a gentleman gave less trouble."

Mr. Walgrave smiled faintly. One poor little innocent heart

had been sorely troubled by his coming. He was a man of the world, but not quite iron; and he had a guilty feeling that his presence in that house had wrought evil.

The fly was at the door, his portmanteau and book-box bestowed upon the roof, and he had only a given time for the drive to Tunbridge junction; yet he lingered, looking round him doubtfully.

"I think I ought to say good-bye to your niece, Mrs. Redmayne," he observed at last.

"You're very polite, I'm sure, sir; and I daresay Grace might take it unkind if you went away without wishing her good-morning. She's been brought up at boarding-school, and is full of fancies. Bless my soul, where is the girl? Grace!"

The parlour-door opened quickly at that shrill cry, and Grace appeared on the threshold, pale to the lips, scarcely able to stand. Happily for her, Mrs. James's attention was distracted at that moment by her son and heir, who had just contrived to smash a pane in the half-glass door with one end of the traveller's fishing-rod.

For a long time Grace Redmayne's image, as she looked at that moment, haunted Hubert Walgrave. The pale plaintive look, the despairing eyes, with a kind of wildness in them. Her image in many shapes was destined to haunt him for the rest of his life, but he never forgot that one look, that mute unconscious appeal.

He went to her as she stood by the door, and took her hand.

"I could not go away without wishing you good-bye, Grace," he said. "I have been telling your aunt how happy I have been here, and that I mean to come again—some day."

He waited, half expecting her to speak, but she said nothing. The pale lips quivered slightly, and that was all.

"Good-bye," he repeated; and then in a lower voice, "Good-bye, and God bless you, my darling!"

He turned quickly away, shook hands with Mrs. Redmayne, and then with the elder of the lads, on whom he bestowed a couple of sovereigns for fishing-tackle; the house-servant had been already fed, and was smiling the smile of gratitude from the background. In another minute the driver smacked his whip, the wheels grated on the gravel, and Hubert Walgrave was gone.

"It makes us a full hour late for beginning the wash," said aunt Hannah; "but everything's in soak, and we've got a good drying day, that's one blessing."

Grace dragged herself up to her room, somehow, groping blindly up the familiar old staircase, with a mist of unshed tears before her eyes. O weary limbs! O heavy, heavy heart! Was there never again to be any joy for her upon this earth?

CHAPTER X.

MR. WALGRAVE IS SATISFIED WITH HIMSELF.

THE ten A.M. express whisked Mr. Walgrave up to town in something less than an hour. The fair Kentish landscape shot past the carriage-window, little by little losing its charm of rural seclusion, growing suburban, dotted thickly and more thickly with villas, here newly whitened stucco of the rustic Italian style, there fresh red brick of severely gothic design; for oaks came laurels, for mighty beeches of half a dozen centuries' growth monkey trees planted the day before yesterday; every house had its glittering conservatory, trim lawn, and geometrical flower-beds, all ablaze with Tom Thumb geraniums and calceolarias; everywhere the same aspect of commonplace British prosperity. Then the bright well-ordered suburb melted into the crowded southern fringe of the great town. The air became flavoured with soap-boiling, tallow, new boots—on the right hand a far-off odour of cordage and tar from Deptford; on the left, the dismal swamps of Bermondsey. Then a clang and a clatter, a shrieking and puffing, and jerking and snorting; a stoppage or two—apparently purposeless—and, lo, Mr. Walgrave was at the London-bridge station; and it seemed to him as if Grace Redmayne, and the life that he had been living for the last few weeks, could scarcely belong to such a world as this. It was a dreary awakening from a delicious dream.

He called a cab—a four-wheeler—since he had the responsibility of his luggage, and no one but himself to take charge of it, and drove through the grimy miry streets. Even at this deadeast period of the year the City was noisy with traffic, and full of life and motion; but O, what a dismal kind of life after the yellowing corn-fields, studded with gaudy field flowers, and the rapturous music of the lark, invisible in the empyrean!

"O, to be a country squire with twenty thousand a year," he thought, "and to live my own life! to marry Grace Redmayne, and dawdle away my harmless days riding round my estate; to superintend the felling of a tree or the levelling of a hedge; to lie stretched on the grass at sunset with my head on my wife's lap, my cigar-case and a bottle of claret on the rustic table beside me; to have the renown that goes with a good old name and a handsome income; and to have nothing to wrestle for, no prize to pluck from the slow-growing tree that bears the sour fruit of worldly success—sour to the man who fails to reach it, ashes to the lips of him who wins it too late! And yet we strive—and yet we persevere—and yet we sacrifice all for the hope of that."

The cab took him to one of the gates of the Temple, and

deposited him finally in King's-bench-walk. Here he had his chambers, a handsome suite upon the first floor, where he chose to live in defiance of fashion. He fully knew the value of externals, and that well-made chairs and tables are in a manner the outward expression of a man's mental worth. There was no *bric-à-brac*; nor were the doors shadowed by those ruby velvet *portières*, which seem to prevail more in light literature than in the houses of everyday life. The rooms were large and lofty, and had all the charm of fine old mantelpieces, deep window seats, and well-preserved panelling. The furniture was solid and in good order—a little old-fashioned, and therefore in harmony with the rooms. There were books on every side, but no luxury of binding—such books as a gentleman and a lawyer should possess—in sober decent garb, and arranged with an extreme nicety in fine old mahogany bookcases of that Georgian period whereof the furniture seems always to bear on its front a palpable protest against any pretensions to beauty. There were two or three comfortable easy-chairs, upholstered in russet morocco; a writing-table with innumerable drawers and pigeon-holes; a pair of handsome bronze moderator lamps; and over the high mantel piece in the principal room one picture, the only picture in Hubert Walgrave's chambers.

It was a portrait, the portrait of a woman, with a face of almost perfect loveliness—arch, piquant, bewitching, with hazel eyes that had the light of happy laughter in their brightness. The costume, which the painter had made a little fanciful in its character, was obviously old-fashioned; between thirty and forty years old at the least. As a work of art the picture was a gem, a portrait which Reynolds or Romney—"the man in Cavendish-square"—might have been proud of.

A quiet-looking middle-aged man-servant received Mr. Walgrave, and busied himself with the carrying in of the luggage. He was half butler, half valet; slept in a closet off the small kitchen which lurked at the back of those handsome rooms; and with the aid of a laundress, who might often be heard scrubbing and sweeping in the early morning, but was rarely beheld by human eye except his own, conducted Mr. Walgrave's household. He was altogether a model servant, the result of a good many experiments in the domestic line, was efficient in the duties of a valet, and could broil a chop and boil a potato to perfection, and conducted in no small measure to Hubert Walgrave's comfort. His name was Cuppage—Christian name Abraham—not by reason of any Jewish element in his race but on account of the biblical tendencies of his mother, to whom he still proudly alluded, on familiar occasions, as an unequalled clear-starcher and a staunch Bible Christian.

"Any letters, Cuppage?" Mr. Walgrave inquired, frowning

himself into his favourite arm-chair, and looking round the room listlessly.

It was a very pleasant room, looking westward, and commanding a fine view of that one feature which London has most reason to boast of, the river. It was a comfortable room, stamped with the individuality of the man to whom it belonged, and Mr. Walgrave was fond of it. His books, his papers, his pipes, all the things which made life agreeable to him, were here. In this room he had worked for the last seven years, ever since he had begun to earn money by his profession; and the book-shelves had been filling gradually all that time, every volume added by his own hands, picked up by himself, and in accordance with his own especial tastes.

He began to be reconciled to the change from that shady old house in Kent, with the perfume of a thousand flowers blowing in at every window. London was dull, and empty, and dingy, but he had the things he cared for—books and perfect ease.

"I think I was made to be an old bachelor," he thought. "I should hardly care to leave these rooms to inhabit a palace, unless—unless it was with Grace Redmayne. Strange that a farmer's daughter, educated at a provincial boarding-school, should exercise more influence over me than any woman I ever met—should seem to me cleverer and brighter than the brightest I ever encountered in society. I don't think I am so weak a fool as to be won by beauty alone, though I would be the last to underrate *that* charm. I don't think I should have been so fond of that girl, if she were not something more than beautiful."

"I should have been so fond." Mr. Walgrave put his passion in a past tense, tried to consider it altogether a thing of the past; and then began to walk slowly up and down his room now and then pausing by one of the three windows to look absently out at the sunlit river, with its fleet of black panting steamers and slow coal barges, and here and there a dingy sail flapping in the faint summer wind, thinking of Grace Redmayne.

What was she doing just at this moment? he wondered. Wandering listlessly in the garden, perhaps, quite alone, and very sorrowful.

"I shall never forget that white despairing face of hers," he said to himself. "The thought of it gives me an actual pain at my heart. If—if I were a weak man, I should take my carpet-bag and go back by the afternoon train. I can fancy how the sweet face would light up at sight of me. But I should be something worse than a fool if I did that. The wrench is over. Thank heaven, I acted honourably; told her the truth from the

first. And now I have only to make it my business to forget her."

There were letters for him. Cuppage had arranged them symmetrically in a neat group upon the writing-table at the right hand of the morocco-covered slope on which Mr. Walgrave was wont to write. He ceased from his promenade presently, and directed his attention to these, as some sort of distraction from meditations which he felt were perilous. They were not likely to be particularly interesting—his letters had been forwarded to him daily at Brierwood—but they would serve to occupy his mind for an hour or so.

There was one, bearing the Kensington post-mark, in a hand which surprised him. A large thick envelope, sealed with a monogram in gold and colour, and directed in a bold firm hand, square and uniform in style, which might be masculine or feminine.

It was very familiar to Hubert Walgrave. He gave a little start of surprise—not altogether pleased surprise—on seeing this letter, and tore open the envelope hurriedly, to the utter destruction of the emblazoned monogram, in which the initials A. H. V. went in and out of each other in the highest style of florid gothic.

The letter was not a long one.

ACROPOLIS-SQUARE,

August 19th.

"My dear Hubert,—You will no doubt be surprised to receive my letter from the above address. Papa grew suddenly tired of Ems, and elected to spend the rest of the autumn in England. So here we are for a day or two, deliberating whether we shall go to some quiet watering-place, or pay off some of our arrears with friends. Papa lent the Ryde villa to Mrs. Filmer before we went away, and of course we can't turn her out. The Stapletons want us at Hayley, and the Beresfords have asked us for ever so many years to Abblecopp Abbey, a fine old place in the depths of Wales. But I daresay the question will resolve itself into our going to Eastbourne or Bognor.

"I hope you are getting quite strong and well. If there were any chance of your being in town for a few hours—I suppose you do come sometimes on business—between this and next Thursday, we should be very glad to see you; but I do not wish to interfere with your doctor's injunctions about rest and quiet. Ems was *dul à faire frémir*. Half a dozen eccentric toilets, as many ladies who were talked about, a Russian prince, and all the rest the dreariest of the invalid species—so even Kensington-gardens in August are agreeable by way of a change.—Always sincerely yours,

"AUGUSTA HARCROSS VALLOXY."

Mr. Walgrave twisted the letter round in his fingers thoughtfully, with rather a grim smile upon his face.

"Cool," he said to himself. "A gentlemanlike epistle. None of the *Eloisa* or *Sappho* to *Phaon* business, at any rate. I wonder what kind of a letter *Grace Redmayne* would write me if we were plighted lovers, and had not seen each other for seven or eight weeks. What a gushing stream of tenderness would well from that fond young heart! '*Angusta Marcross Vallory*,'" looking at the dashing semi-masculine autograph with a half-scornful admiration. "What a fine straight up-and-down hand she writes—with a broad-nibbed pen, and a liberal supply of ink! One could fancy her signing death-warrants just as firmly. I wonder she doesn't sign herself '*Harcross and Vallory*.' It would seem more natural. Not a bad name for a barony, by the way—like *Stamford* and *Warrington*. Her husband may be raised to the peerage some day by such a title." And at the suggestion, made in bitter jest, a dim faint vision of an ermine cap with six pearls arose before *Hubert Walgrave's* mental gaze.

"Men have sat in the Upper House who began with smaller advantages than mine," he thought. "A fortune like *Angusta Vallory's* will buy anything in commercial England. One by one the old names are dropping out of the list; and of ten new ones, eight are chosen for the extent of a man's landed estate, or the balance he keeps at his bank. And when money is conjoined with professional renown, the thing is so easy. But it would be rather singular if I were to sit in the Upper House and *Sir Francis Clevedon* in the Lower."

He looked at his watch. Three o'clock. The day was so old already, and he had done nothing—not even answered the three or four letters that required to be answered. He took a quire of paper, dashed off a few rapid replies, left *Miss Vallory's* note unanswered, and lighted a meditative cigar. *Cuppage* came in while he was smoking it to inquire if his master would dine at home.

"No. You can put my things ready for me in an hour. I shall dine out this evening, and I may want to dress early."

The cigar soothed him. That little commonplace note of *Angusta Vallory's* had diverted his mind in some measure—had sent his thoughts in a new direction. He was no longer depressed. On the contrary, he was pleased with himself and the world—rather proud of his own conduct during the late crisis in his life—inclined to applaud and approve himself as a generous, honourable-minded man of the world. He did not consider that honour and generosity and worldliness were in any way incompatible.

"Nothing could have been more straightforward than my conduct to that dear girl," he said to himself. "From first to

last I was thoroughly candid. Come what may, I can have nothing to reproach myself with on that score."

CHAPTER XI.

ON DUTY.

EVERYBODY knows Acropolis-square and the region to which it belongs—the region amidst which has of late arisen the Albert Hall, but where at this remoter period the Albert Hall was not; only the glittering fabric of the Horticultural Society's great conservatory, and an arid waste, whereon the Exhibition of 1862 had lately stood. Acropolis-square is a splendid quadrangle of palatial residences, whose windows look out upon a geometrically-arranged garden, where small detachments of the juvenile aristocracy, not yet "out," play croquet in the warm June noontide, or in the dewy twilight, when mamma and the elder girls have driven off to halls of dazzling light, and the governesses are off duty.

Acropolis-square, in the height of the London season—when there are carriages waiting at half the doors, and awnings hung out over half the balconies, and a wealth of flowers everywhere, and pretty girls mounting for their canter in the Row, and a general flutter of gaiety and animation pervading the very atmosphere—is bright and pleasant enough; but at its best it has all the faults of New London. Every house is the facsimile of its neighbour; there is none of that individuality of architecture which gives a charm to the more sombre mansions of the old-fashioned squares—Grosvenor and Portman and Cavendish; not a break in the line of porches; not a difference of a mullion in the long range of windows; and instead of the deep mellow hue of that red-brick which so admirably harmonises with the gray background of an English sky, the perpetual gloom of a dark drab stucco.

The city of Babylon, when her evil days had fallen upon her was not drearier than Acropolis-square at the end of August. Or so Hubert Walgrave thought, as a hansom, with irreverent rattle, whisked him round a corner, and into that solemn quadrangle of stucco palaces, from whose drab fronts the gay striped awnings had vanished and the flowers departed, and where no "click" of croquet-ball sounded on the burnt-up grass in the enclosure.

Mr. Vallory's house was one of the most perfectly appointed in the square. It was not possible to give an individual character to any one of those stucco mansions; but so far as the perfection of hearth-stoning and window-cleaning could go, the

character of Mr. Vallory's mansion was respectability, solidity, a gravity of aspect that suggested wealth. The dining-room curtains, of which the respectful passer-by caught a glimpse, were of the deepest and darkest shade of claret—no gaudy obtrusive crimson or ruby—and of a material so thick that the massive folds seemed hewn out of stone. The shutters to the dining-room windows were dark oak, relieved by the narrowest possible beading of gold. Even the draperies that shrouded the French casements of the drawing-room were a dark-green silk damask; and the only ornaments visible from the outside were bronze statuettes, and monster vases of purple-and-gold Oriental china. The muslins, and laces, and chintzes, and rose-coloured linings which gladdened the eye in neighbouring houses had no place here.

A footman in a chocolate livery, and with his hair powdered, admitted Mr. Walgrave to the hall, which was adorned with a black marble stove like a tomb, an ecclesiastical brass lamp, and had altogether a sepulchral look, as of a mortuary chapel. The man gave a faintly supercilious glance at the parting hansom—Mr. Vallory had so few cabs in his visiting-list—before he ushered Mr. Walgrave to the drawing-room.

"Is Miss Vallory at home?"

"Yes, sir; Miss Vallory returned from her drive half an hour ago."

The drawing-room was quite empty, however; and the footman departed in quest of Miss Vallory's maid, to whom to communicate the arrival of a visitor for her mistress—whereby Miss Vallory had to wait about ten minutes for the information. The drawing-room was empty—a howling wilderness of gorgeous furniture, opening by means of a vast archway into a smaller desert, where a grand piano stood in the centre of a barren waste of Axminster carpet. Everything in the two rooms was of the solid school—no nonsense about it—and everything was costly to the last degree. Ebony cabinets, decorated with clusters of fruit, in cornelian and agate; Hercules and the Bull in bronze, on a stand of verde antique. No cups and saucers, no Dresden déjeuners, no Chelsea shepherdesses, no photograph albums; but a pair of carved-oak stands for engravings, supporting elephantine portfolios of Albert Dürer's and Rembrandt's etchings, and early impressions from plates of Hogarth's own engraving. There were a few choice pictures, small and modern, things that had been among the gems of their year in the Academy; just enough to show that neither taste nor wealth was wanting for the collection of a gallery. There was an exquisite group in white marble, forming the centre of a vast green satin ottoman; but of *bric-à-brac* there was none. The visitor found no dainty rubbish, no costly trifles scattered on

every side to amuse an empty quarter of an hour. After he had examined the half-dozen or so of pictures, he could only pace the Axminster, contemplative of the geometrical design in various shades of green, or gaze dreamily from one of the windows at the drab palaces on the other side of the square.

Hubert Walgrave paced the carpet, and looked about the room thoughtfully as he walked. It seemed larger to him than it had ever appeared before, after that shady parlour at Brierwood, with its low ceiling and heavy oaken beams, dark-brown paneling and humble furniture. In such rooms as this he might hope to live all his life, and to enjoy all the distinction which such surroundings give—without Grace Redmayne. The picture of his future life, with all the advantages of wealth and influence which his marriage was to bring him, had always been very agreeable to him. He was scarcely the kind of man to be fascinated by that other picture of love in a cottage. And yet to-day, face to face with Hercules and the Bull, his vagabond fancy, taking its own road in spite of him, shaped the vision of a life with Grace in some trim suburban villa—a hard-working life, with desperate odds against success, only the woman he loved for his wife, and domestic happiness.

“It isn’t as if I hadn’t won some kind of position already,” he said to himself, “to say nothing of having a decent income of my own. And yet, what would my chances be with old Vallory dead against me? To drag on miserably upon the outskirts of my profession, and live upon three hundred a year; no house in Mayfair; no villa between Strawberry hill and Chertsey! no crack club—I couldn’t afford even that tranquil haven for man’s misfortune; no Eton for my boys; no Hanoverian governess for my girls; no yacht, no stable, no social status. Only Grace’s sweet face growing pinched and worn with petty cares and daily worries; a herd of children in a ten-roomed house; a maid-of-all-work to cook my dinner; summonses for unpaid poor-rates on every mantelpiece; the water-supply cut off with a dismal regularity once a quarter. Who doesn’t know every detail of the sordid picture? Pshaw! Why, were I even inclined to sacrifice myself—and I am not—it would be no kindness to Grace to consummate my own extinction by such a step.”

There was a strange wavering of the balance; but the scale always turned ultimately on the same side—the side of worldly wisdom. True as the needle to the pole was the mind of Hubert Walgrave to the one grave fact that he must needs succeed in life—succeed in the popular acceptance of the word—win money and honour; make a name for himself, in short.

“Other men can afford to take life lightly,” he said to himself; “to ruin themselves even, in a gentlemanly way. They start from an elevation: and it takes a long time going down

On Duty.

hill. I begin at the bottom, and am bound to climb. Essex could trifle with opportunities which were of vital importance to Raleigh. Yet they both ended the same way, by the bye, the trifler and the deep thinker."

A door opened with the resonance of a door in a cathedral, and a rustle of silken fabric announced the approach of Miss Vallory.

Augusta Vallory, sole daughter of the house and heart of Mr. William Vallory, solicitor, of Harcrose Vallory, and Vallory, Old Jewry, was not a woman to be criticised lightly, with a brief sentence or two. She was eminently handsome—tall, beyond the common height of women, with sloping shoulders and a willowy waist; a long slim throat, crowned with a head that was almost classic in form, a face about which there could be scarcely two opinions.

She was a brunette: her eyes the darkest hazel, cold and clear; her hair as nearly black as English hair ever is; her complexion faultless; a skin which never lacked exactly the right tints of crimson and creamy white—a complexion so perfect, that if Miss Vallory had an enemy of her own sex, that enemy might have suggested *vinaigre de rouge* and *blanc Rosati*; a delicate aquiline nose, thin lips—just a shade too thin perhaps—a finely modelled chin, and flashing white teeth, that gave life and light to her face. The forehead was somewhat low and narrow; and, perfect as the eyelashes and eyebrows might be, the eyes themselves had a certain metallic brilliancy, which was too much like the brightness of a deep-hued topaz or a catseye.

She was dressed superbly; indeed, dress with Miss Vallory was the most important business of life. She had never had occasion to give herself much trouble on any other subject; and to dress magnificently was at once an occupation and an amusement. To be striking, original, out of the common, was her chief aim. She did not affect the every-day pinks and blues and mauves of her acquaintance, but, with the aid of a French milliner, devised more artistic combinations—rich browns and fawns and dead-leaf tints, rare shades of gray, relieved by splashes of vivid colour—laces which a dowager duchess might have sighed for. Miss Vallory did not see any reason why the married of her sex should alone be privileged to wear gorgeous apparel. Rich silks and heavy laces became her splendid beauty better than the muslins and gauzes of the *demoiselle à marier*.

To-day she wore a fawn-coloured silk dress, with a train that swept the carpet for upwards of a yard behind her—a corded fawn-coloured silk high to the throat, without a vestige of trimming on body or sleeves, but a wide crimson sash tied in a

loose knot on one side of the slender waist. The tight sleeves, the narrow linen collar, became her to admiration. A doubtful complexion would have been made execrable by the colour; every defect in an imperfect figure would have been rendered doubly obvious by the fashion of the dress. Miss Vallory wore it in the insolence of her beauty, as if she would have said to her less perfect sisters, "Imitate me if you dare!"

The lovers shook hands, kissed each other, even in a business-like way.

"Why, Hubert, how well you are looking!" said Miss Vallory. "I expected to see you still an invalid."

"Well, no, my dear Augusta; there must come an end to everything. I went into the country to complete my cure; and I think I may venture to say that I am cured."

Mr. Walgrave's tone grew graver with those last words. He was thinking of another disease than that for which the London physician had treated him, wondering whether he were really on the high road to recovery from that more fatal fever.

"I need not tell you how well *you* are looking," he went on gaily; "that is your normal state."

"Ems was horrid," exclaimed Miss Vallory. "I was immensely glad to come away. How did you like your farmhouse? It must have been rather dreary work, I should think."

"Yes; it did become rather dreary work—at the last."

"You liked it very well at first, then?" inquired the young lady, with a slight elevation of the faultless eyebrows. She was not particularly sentimental; but she would have preferred to be told that he had found existence odious without her.

"No; it was not at all bad—for a week or so. The place is old-fashioned and picturesque, the country round magnificent. There were plenty of chub, too; and there was a pike I very much wanted to catch. I shall go in for him again next year, I daresay."

"I have never been able to comprehend what any man can find to interest him in fishing."

"It has long been my hopeless endeavour to discover what any woman can have to say to her milliner for an hour and a half at a stretch," answered Mr. Walgrave coolly.

Augusta Vallory smiled—a cold hard smile.

"I suppose you have found it rather tiresome when I have kept you waiting at Madame Bouffante's," she said carelessly; "but there are some things one cannot decide in a hurry; and Bouffante is too busy, or too grand, to come to me."

"What an unfathomable science dress is! That gown you have on now, for instance," surveying her critically, "doesn't seem very elaborate. I should think you might make it yourself."

"No doubt, if I had been apprenticed to a dressmaker. Unfortunately, papa omitted that branch of instruction from his programme for my education. Madame Bouffante cut this dress *herself*. The train is a new style, that was only introduced three weeks ago by the Empress of the French."

"Good heavens! and I did not recognise the novelty when you came into the room. What a barbarian I am! But, do you know, I have seen women who made their own dresses—when I was a boy."

"I cannot help it, my dear Hubert, if you have lived amongst curious people."

He was thinking of Grace Redmayne as he had seen her one Saturday afternoon seated under the cedar, running the seams of a blue-and-white muslin dress which she was to wear at church next morning, and in which, to his eyes, she had seemed fairer than a wood nymph. Yet Miss Vallory was much handsomer than Grace, even without the adventitious aid of dress—much handsomer, but not so lovely.

"I have come to ask if I may stay to dinner," said Mr Walgrave, seated comfortably on the great green satin ottoman, with Miss Vallory by his side—not ridiculously near him in any lackadaisical plighted-lover-like fashion, but four or five feet away, with a flowing river of fawn-coloured silk between them. "You see, I am in regulation costume."

"Papa will be very glad. We have not told any one we are in town; and indeed I don't suppose there is a creature we know in London. You will enliven him a little."

"And papa's daughter?"

"O, of course; you know I am always pleased to see you. Half-past six," looking at her watch. "If you are very good I won't change my dress for dinner, and we can have a comfortable gossip instead."

"I mean to be unexampled in goodness. But under ordinary circumstances—with no one you know in town—would you really put on something more splendid than that orange-tawny gown, for the sole edification of the butler?"

"I dress for papa, and because I am in the habit of doing so, I suppose."

"If women had only a regulation costume like ours—black silk, and a white muslin tie—what an amount of envy and heart-burning might be avoided! And it would give the handsome ones a fairer start—weight for age, as it were—instead of the present system of handicapping."

"I don't in the least understand what you mean, Hubert. Imagine girls in society dressed in black, like the young women in a haberdasher's shop!"

"Yes, that's an objection. Yet we submit to apparel our-

selves like butlers. However, being so perfect as you are, it is foolishness to wish you otherwise. And now tell me all your news. I languish to hear what you have been doing."

This was an agreeable easy-going manner of concealing the fact that Mr. Walgrave had nothing particular to say. The woman who was to be his wife was handsome, accomplished, well versed in all worldly knowledge; yet they met after eight weeks' severance and he had nothing to say to her. He could only lean lazily back upon the ottoman, and admire her with cold critical eyes. Time had been when he fancied himself in love with her. He could never have won so rich a prize without some earnestness of intention on his own part, without some reality of feeling; but whatever force the passion had possessed, was all expended, it was gone utterly. He looked at her to-day and told himself that she was one of the handsomest women in London, and that he cared for her no more than if she had been a statue.

She was very handsome; but so is a face in a picture. He had seen many faces on canvas that had more life, and light, and soul in them than had ever glorified hers. His heart had been so nearly her own, but she had wrought no spell to hold it. What had she ever given him except her cold business-like consent to be his wife, at some vaguely defined future period, when his prospects and position should be completely satisfactory to her father? What had she ever given him—what tears, or fond looks from soft beseeching eyes, or little clinging touches of a tremulous white hand—what evidence that he was nearer or dearer to her than any other eligible person in her visiting list? Did he not know only too well that in her mind this lower world began and ended with Augusta Vallory—that nothing in the universe had any meaning for her except so far as it affected herself? One night when she had been singing Tennyson's song, "Home they brought her warrior dead," Mr. Walgrave said to her, as he leant across the piano,

"If you had been the lady, Augusta, what a nuisance you would have considered the funeral!"

"Funerals are very dreadful," she answered with a shudder.

"And they might as well have buried her warrior where he fell. If I ever come to grief in the hunting-field, I will make an arrangement beforehand that they carry me straight to the nearest village deadhouse, and leave me there till the end."

CHAPTER XII.

HARCROSS AND VALLORY.

WILLIAM VALLORY, of Harcross and Vallory, was one of the wealthiest attorneys in the city of London. The house had

been established for something over a century, and the very name of the firm meant all that was most solid and expensive in legal machinery. The chief clerks at Vallory's—the name of Harcross was nowadays only a fiction, for the last Harcross slept the sleep of respectability in a splendid mausoleum at Kensal Green—the very clerks at Vallory's were full-blown lawyers, whose salaries gave them larger incomes than they could hope to earn by practising on their own account. The appearance of the house was like that of a bank, solemn and strong; with outer offices and inner offices; long passages where the footfall was muffled by kamptulicon; Mr. Vallory's room, spacious and lofty, a magnificent apartment, which might have been built for a board-room; Mr. Weston Vallory's room; Mr. Smith's room, Mr. Jones's room, Mr. Thompson's room. Weston Vallory attended to common law, and had an outer chamber thronged with anxious clients. Economy of labour had been studied in all the arrangements. In the hall there was a large mahogany tablet inscribed with the names of the heads of the firm and chief clerks, and against every name a sliding label, with the magic word *In*, or the depressing announcement *Out*. The whole edifice was pervaded with gutta-percha tubing, and information of the most private character could be conveyed to far-off rooms in a stage whisper. There were humble clients who never got any farther than Mr. Thompson; and indeed to all common clay the head of the house was as invisible as the Mikado of Japan.

In the Bankruptcy Court there was no such power existent as Harcross and Vallory. Commissioners quailed before them, and judges themselves deferred to the Olympian power of William Vallory. The bankrupt—failing for half a million or so, the firm only undertook great cases—who confided himself to Harcross and Vallory was tenderly led through the devious paths of insolvency, and brought forth from the dark valley at last with a reputation white as the undriven snow. Under the Vallory treatment a man's creditors became the offenders; inasmuch as they did, by a licentious system of credit, lure him to his ruin. Half-a-crown in the pound in the hands of Harcross and Vallory went farther than seven-and-sixpence administered by a meaner house.

They were great in Chancery business too, and kept a printing-press perpetually at work upon bills of complaint or answers. The light of their countenance was as the sunshine to young barristers, and even Queen's counsel bowed down and worshipped them. They never allowed a client to lift his finger, in a legal way, without counsel's opinion. They were altogether expensive, famous, and respectable. To have Harcross and Vallory for one's family solicitors was in itself a stamp of respectability

They were reputed to be enormously rich, or rather William Vallory, in whose person the firm now centred, was so reputed. Weston Vallory, his nephew, was a very junior partner, taking a seventh share or so of the profits; a bachelor of about thirty, who rode a good horse, had a trim little villa at Norwood, and lived altogether in the odour of respectability. Not to be respectable would have entailed certain banishment from those solemn halls and stony corridors in the Old Jewry.

Stephen Harcross, Augusta Vallory's godfather, had died a wealthy old bachelor, and had left the bulk of his fortune, which was for the chief part in stock and shares of divers kinds, to his goddaughter—having lived at variance with his own flesh and blood, and being considerably impressed by the beauty, accomplishments, and general merits of that young lady. Whereby it came to pass that Miss Vallory, besides having splendid expectations from her father, was already possessor of a clear three thousand per annum. What her father might have to leave was an open question. He lived at the rate of five thousand a year; but was supposed to be making at least eight, and Augusta was his only child.

It was, of course, a wonderful stroke of fortune for such a man as Hubert Walgrave, with three hundred a year and his profession, to become the accepted suitor of Augusta Vallory. The thing had come about simply enough. Her father had taken him by the hand three or four years before; had been pleased with him, and had invited him a good deal to Acropolis-square, and to a villa at Ryde, where the Vallorys spent some part of every summer—invited him in all unconsciousness of any danger in such an acquaintance. He had naturally rather lofty notions upon the subject of his daughter's matrimonial prospects. He was in no hurry for her to marry; would, so far as his own selfish desires went, have infinitely preferred that she should remain unmarried during his lifetime. But she was a beauty and an heiress, and he told himself that she must inevitably marry, and could hardly fail to marry well. He had vague visions of a coronet. It would be pleasant to read his daughter's name in the *Peerage* before he died. All such ideas were put to flight, however, when Miss Vallory coolly announced to him one morning that Mr. Walgrave had proposed to her on the previous night, and that with her father's approval she meant to marry him; not without her father's approval, she was much too well-brought-up a young woman to conceive the possibility of any such rebellion. But, on the other hand, if she were not allowed to marry Hubert Walgrave, she would certainly marry no one else.

William Vallory was dumbfounded. He had suspected nothing, seen nothing. There had been a few accidental meetings at flower-shows in London. Hubert Walgrave had been

among the young men most frequently invited to fill up the ranks at the Acropolis-square dinner-parties; he knew a good many people in Miss Vallory's set, and had happened thus to meet her very often in the course of the London season. Then came an autumn invitation to Mr. Vallory's villa at Ryde; a great deal of idling on the pier, an occasional moonlit stroll, a little yachting—most fascinating of all pleasures; during which Augusta Vallory, who was never sea-sick, looked her handsomest, in the most perfect marine costume that a French dress-maker could devise.

It was while he was on board Mr. Vallory's yacht, the *Arion*, one balmy August morning, that Hubert Walgrave told himself for the first time that he was in love with Augusta. She was sitting opposite him, making a pretence of reading a novel, dressed in blue and white, with a soft cashmere scarf floating about her tall slim figure, and a high-crowned hat with a bunch of white-and-blue feathers crowning the massive plaits of black hair.

"Why shouldn't I marry her?" Mr. Walgrave said to himself. "The notion looks preposterous at the first showing, but I really think she likes me—and she must marry some one. Her fortune would be an immense assistance to me; and over and above that, she is a woman who would help her husband to get on in life, even if she hadn't sixpence. She is the only woman I have ever really admired; perhaps the only woman who ever liked me."

At this stage of Hubert Walgrave's career he had no very exalted idea of that passion which makes or mars the lives of some men and counts for so little in the careers of others. He meant never to marry at all unless he could marry to his own direct and immediate advantage. If he married, he must marry money; that was clear. The income which was ample for all his wants as a single man would be ridiculously small when set against the requirements of a wife and family. He was very positive upon this point, but he was no heiress-hunter. Not the wealth of Miss Kilmansegg would have tempted him to unite himself to a fright or a dowdy, a woman who dropped her *h's*, or was in any manner unpresentable. Nor did he go out of his way to seek Miss Vallory. Fate threw them together, and he merely improved his opportunity. Of all the men she had ever known, he was the one who treated her with most non-chalance, who paid least court to her beauty or her wealth. Perhaps it was for this very reason that she fell in love with him, so far as it was in her nature to fall in love with any one.

So one moonlit night on the little lawn at Ryde—a lawn sloping to the seashore—Mr. Walgrave proposed, in a pleasant, gentlemanlike, unimpassioned way.

"Of course, my dear Augusta," he said in conclusion, "I can-

not be blind to the fact that I am a very bad match for you, and that I am bound to do a good deal more than I have done towards winning a position before I can reasonably expect any encouragement from your father. But I am not afraid of hard work, and if *you* are only favourably disposed towards me I shall feel inspired to do anything—push my way to the woolsack, or something of that kind.”

And then, little by little, he induced Miss Vallory to admit that she was favourably disposed towards him—very favourably—that she had liked him almost from the first. That final confession was going as far as any well-brought-up young person could be expected to go.

“You have not been so absurdly attentive as other men,” she said, “and I really believe I have liked you all the better on that account.”

Mr. Walgrave smiled, and registered an unspoken vow to the effect that Miss Vallory should have ample cause to continue so to like him.

It was rather a long time before Mr. Vallory quite got over the shock occasioned by his daughter’s astounding announcement; but he did ultimately get over it, and consented to receive Hubert Walgrave as his future son-in-law.

“I will not attempt to conceal from you that it is a disappointment,” he said; “I may say a blow, a very severe blow. I had hoped that Augusta would make a brilliant marriage. I think I had a right to expect as much. But I have always liked you, Walgrave, and—and—if my daughter really knows her own mind, I can hold out no longer. You will not think of marrying just yet, I suppose?”

“I am quite in your hands upon that point, my dear sir. My own desire would be to make an assured position for myself before I ask Augusta to share my fortunes. I couldn’t, on any consideration, become a dependent on my wife; and my present income would not allow me to give her an establishment which would, even in a minor degree, be the kind of thing she has been accustomed to.”

“That’s all high-flown nonsense!” exclaimed Mr. Vallory rather impatiently. “If you marry Augusta, you will marry her money as well as herself. As to waiting till you’ve a silk gown—well, you may do it if you like, and if she likes. I shall be glad to keep her near me as long as I can. But you will be as old as I am, I take it, before you can hope to win a position that would be anything like what she has a right to expect. She has made a bad bargain, you see, my dear Walgrave; and there’s no use in our trying to make-believe that it’s a good one.”

Hubert Walgrave’s dark face grew just a shade darker at this, and the flexible lips tightened a little.

"If it is so very bad a bargain, sir," he said gravely, "it is not at all too late for you to rescind your approval, or for me to withdraw my pretensions."

The great William Vallory looked absolutely frightened. His only child had a will of her own, and a temper of her own; and he had had more than one unpleasant scene with her already upon this question.

"No, no, my dear fellow!" he answered hastily; "bless my soul, how touchy you are! Haven't I told you that I like you? My daughter's feelings are involved; and if she likes to marry for love, she can afford to do it. It will not be love in a cottage; or, if it is, it will be a cottage of gentility, with a double coach-house, and so on."

Thus Mr. Walgrave found himself accepted, much more easily than he could have supposed it possible he should be. He was engaged to a young woman with three thousand a year in the present, and unlimited expectations of future wealth. It seemed like some wild dream. Yet he bore this sudden fortune with the utmost equanimity. Indeed, it scarcely surprised him: he had made up his mind from the beginning to prosper in life.

Once, and once only, William Vallory ventured upon some slight inquiry as to his future son-in-law's connections.

"I have never heard you speak of your family," he said one evening, as the two men sat alone in the spacious dining-room—an apartment that was almost awful in its aspect when sparsely occupied—with a Pompeian claret-jug between them. "I need scarcely say how pleased I shall be to make the acquaintance of any of your people."

"I have no people," Mr. Walgrave answered coolly. "I think you must have heard me say that I stand quite alone in the world. Augusta will not receive many wedding presents from my side of the house; but, on the other hand, she will not be troubled by any poor relations of mine. My father and mother both died while I was a youngster. I was brought up in Essex by a maiden aunt. She too has been dead for the last five-and-twenty years, poor soul! She was a kind friend to me."

"Your father was a professional man, I suppose," hazarded Mr. Vallory, who would have been gratified by a more communicative spirit in his future son-in-law.

"He was not. He lived upon his means, and spent them."

"But he left you fairly provided for."

"He left me three hundred a year, thanks to the good offices of a friend who had considerable influence over him. The money was settled upon me in such a way that my father could not touch it. I should have begun life a beggar if it had been in his power to dispose of the money."

"You don't speak very kindly of him."

"Perhaps not. I daresay I am somewhat wanting in filial reverence. The fact is, he could have afforded to do a good deal more for me than he did do, and I have not yet learnt to forgive him. He was not a good father, and, frankly, I don't much care about talking of him."

This was like a conversational dead wall, with "No thoroughfare" inscribed upon it. Mr. Vallory asked no more questions. Hubert Walgrave was a gentleman—that was the grand point; and it mattered very little how many uncles and aunts he had, or if he were totally destitute of such kindred. He was clever, energetic, hard-working, and tolerably sure to get on in the world.

"I am not marrying my daughter to a drone, who would stick a flower in his button-hole, and live on his wife's fortune; that is one comfort," the lawyer said to himself.

He had, indeed, no reason to complain of any lack of industry in Hubert Walgrave. From the hour in which his engagement to Miss Vallory became a settled thing he worked harder than ever. That which would have tempted most men to idleness urged him to fiercer effort, to more eager pursuit of that single aim of his existence—self-advancement. He wanted to win a reputation before he married; he did not want people to be able to say, "There goes that lucky fellow Walgrave, who married old Vallory's daughter." He wished to be pointed out rather as the celebrated Mr. Walgrave, Q.C., and his lucky marriage spoken of as a secondary affair, springing out of his success.

With this great end in view—a very worthy aim, in the opinion of a man of his creed, which did not embrace very lofty ideas of this life—Mr. Walgrave had very nearly worked himself into a galloping consumption; and while going this high-pressure pace had been brought to a sudden standstill by that perilous illness which had led to his holiday at Brierwood. Skilful treatment, and a naturally good constitution, which would bear some abuse, had pulled him through, and he was what our forefathers used to call "on the mending hand," when he went down to the old farmhouse, to fall sick of a still more troublesome disease.

CHAPTER XIII.

"THE SHOWS OF THINGS ARE BETTER THAN THEMSELVES."

MR. VALLORY came in just before dinner, bringing a visitor with him—rather a dandified-looking young man, of the unmistakable City type, with faultless boots, a hothouse flower in his

button-hole, carefully-arranged black whiskers, a good-looking supercilious face, a figure just above the middle height, eyes like Augusta's, and a complexion that was a great deal too good for a man. This was the junior partner, the seventh-share man, Weston Vallory.

"I found your cousin Weston at the office, Augusta," said Mr. Vallory, "and brought him home to dinner. You must excuse his morning dress; I wouldn't give him time to change his clothes."

"I always keep a dress suit at the office, and Pullman the porter valets me," said Weston. "I only asked for ten minutes; but you know how impatient your father is, Augusta. So behold me!"

He kissed his cousin, and gave the tips of his fingers to Hubert Walgrave. There was no great affection between those two. Weston had fully intended to marry Augusta, and had been both astounded and outraged by her engagement.

They dined at eight, and the banquet was not especially lively—a little over-weighted with attendance, and plate, and splendour; a large round table, with a pyramid of gaudy autumnal flowers—Japanese clematis and scarlet geranium, calceolaria and verbena—in the centre; four people scarcely able to see each other's faces without an effort, and three solemn servants waiting upon them. Mr. Vallory and his nephew talked shop. Augusta asked her lover little commonplace questions about commonplace things, and gave him small shreds and patches of information respecting her stay at Ems. He caught himself on the brink of a yawn more than once. He thought of the dusky garden at Brierwood—the perfume of the flowers, the low music of Grace Redmayne's voice, the tender touch of her hand. He thought of these things even while Augusta was entertaining him with a lively description of some outrageous costumes she had seen at Ems.

But presently he brightened a little, and made it his business to be amusing, talking in, O, such a stereotyped way, like a creature in genteel comedy. He felt his own dreariness—felt that between him and the woman he was to marry there was no point of union, no touch of sympathy. She talked of Parisian dresses; he talked of the people they knew, in a semi-supercilious style that did duty for irony; and he was miserably conscious of the stupidity and narrowness of the whole business.

He remembered himself roaming in the gardens at Clevedon Hall—along the moss-grown paths, by the crumbling wall where the unprotected cherries ripened for the birds of the air, among the dilapidated cucumber-frames, in a wilderness of vegetable profusion, where the yellow pumpkins sprawled in the sunshine, by the great still pond overhung by a little grove of ancient

quince-trees, in and out amidst waste, neglect, and sweetness—with Grace Redmayne by his side. Was it really the same man seated at this table, peeling a peach, with his eyebrows elevated languidly, and little cynical speeches dropping now and then from his thin lips?

Augusta Vallory was quite satisfied with her lover. He was gentlemanlike and undemonstrative, and had nothing kindly to say about any one or anything. She had no admiration for those exuberant young men from the Universities, great at hammer-throwing and long jumps, who were beginning to overrun her circle—youths with loud cheery voices and sunburnt faces, hands blistered by rowing, and a general healthiness and joyousness of aspect. They only bored her.

After dinner, when Vallory senior and Vallory junior were playing a game of billiards in a room that had been built out at the back of the house over some offices, half-way between the dining and the drawing-rooms, the fair Augusta amused herself by questioning her lover about his life in Kent. It must have been ineffably dismal. What had he done with himself? how had he contrived to dispose of his time?

"Well, of course," said Mr. Walgrave dreamily, "that sort of life is rather monotonous. You get up and eat your breakfast, and walk a little and write a little and read a little; and, if you happen to be a man with that resource open to you, you smoke a great deal, and eat your dinner, and go to bed. And you hardly know Monday from Tuesday; if you were put in a witness-box you couldn't swear whether a given event happened at the end of the week or the beginning. But to a fellow who wants rest, that kind of life is not altogether disagreeable; he gets a honeycomb for his breakfast, a dish of fresh trout now and then, and cream in his tea. And then, you see," concluded Mr. Walgrave, making a sudden end of the subject with a suppressed yawn, "I read a good deal."

"You read a good deal! when the doctors had especially forbidden work!"

"O, but it wasn't hard work, and I don't believe I did myself any good by it; it was only a desultory kind of reading. I was rather anxious about *Cardium versus Cardium*, that Chancery case in which your father wants me to make a figure; and I read up some old precedents bearing on it. There was a man in the reign of James II. who went in against his first cousin on exactly the same grounds. And I read a novel of Anthony Trollope's."

"There could be no harm in your reading a novel. You must have read all the novels of the season, I should think, in seven weeks."

"No, I did a good deal of fishing. I read the acquaintance

of a jack that I mean to bring to terms at some future date. He wasn't to be had this year."

Miss Vallory asked a great many more questions; but it was astonishing how little Mr. Walgrave had to tell of his Kentish experiences.

"You are not a particularly good hand at description, Hubert," she said at last, somewhat displeased by his reticence. "If it had been Weston, he would have given me a perfect picture of the farmhouse life, and the queer clodhopping country people with an imitation of the dialect, and all that kind of thing."

"If I were good at all that kind of thing, I should write for the magazines, or give an entertainment, and turn my gifts into money," replied Mr. Walgrave superciliously. "I wish you'd play something, Augusta."

This was a happy way of getting out of a difficulty, suggested by a glance at the open piano.

"I'll sing you something, if you like," Miss Vallory said graciously. "I was trying a new ballad this morning, which is rather in our style, I fancy."

"Let me hear it, by all means."

He went to the piano, adjusted the candles, which were lighted ready, waited while the performer seated herself, and then withdrew to a comfortable easy-chair. Never during his courtship or since his engagement had he fatigued himself by such puerile attentions as turning over the leaves of music, or cutting open magazines, or any of those small frivolous services by which some men render themselves precious to their womankind. Indeed, in a general way, he may be described as scrupulously inattentive. If this girl chose to give him her wealth, she should bestow it spontaneously. There should be no cajolery on his part, no abasement, not the smallest sacrifice of self-esteem.

Miss Vallory sang her song. She had a strong mezzo-soprano voice of the metallic order—a voice that is usually described as fine—without a weak note in its range. She had been taught by the best masters, pronounced every syllable with undeviating accuracy, and had about as much expression as a musical box.

Hubert Walgrave thought of "Kathleen Mavourneen," and the soft sweet voice singing in the twilight, "O, do you remember?" "The Meeting of the Waters," "The light Guitar," and all Grace Redmayne's little stock of familiar old-fashioned songs. The ballad was something of the new school: the slenderest thread of melody, eked out by a showy accompaniment; the poetry, something rather obscure and metaphysical, by a modern poet.

"Do you call that thing a ballad, Augusta?" he cried contemptuously, at the end of the first verse. "For pity's sake

sing me *Una voce*, or *Non piu mesta*, to take the taste of that rawkish stuff out of my mouth."

Miss Vallory complied, with tolerable grace.

"You are so capricious," she said, as she played one of Rosini's symphonies; "there is no knowing what you will like."

She sang an Italian bravura superbly, looking superb as she sang it, without the faintest effort or distortion of feature, Mr. Walgrave watching her critically all the while.

"Upon my soul, she is a woman to be proud of," he said to himself; "and a man who would sacrifice such a chance as mine would be something worse than a lunatic."

The two lawyers came into the room while Miss Vallory was singing, and Weston complimented her warmly at the close of the scene, while her plighted lover sat in his easy-chair and looked on. He knew very well that the man would have liked to take his place, and he never felt the sense of his triumph so keenly as when he was, in a manner, trampling on the neck of Weston Vallory.

"The black-whiskered scoundrel," he said to himself; "I know that man is a scoundrel, whom necessity has made respectable. He is just the kind of fellow I should expect to make away with his clients' securities, or something in that way. Very likely he may never do anything of the sort, may die in the odour of sanctity; but I know it's in him. And what a delightful thing it is to know that he hates me as he does, and that I shall have to be civil to him all the days of my life!"

And then, after a pause, he thought, "If I were capable of getting myself into a mess, there's the man to profit by my folly."

The unconscious subject of these meditations was leaning over the piano all this time, talking to his cousin. There was not much justification in his appearance or manners for such sweeping condemnation. He was like numerous other men to be met with daily in middle-class society—good-looking, well-dressed, with manners that could be deferential or supercilious according to the occasion. He had plenty of acquaintance who called him a first-rate fellow, and he was never at a loss for invitations to dinner. Only in those eyes of his, which were so like his cousin's in colour, there was a hard glassy glitter, a metallic light, which was not agreeable to a physiognomist; nor had the full red lips a pleasant expression—sensuality had set its seal there, sensuality and a lurking cruelty. But the world in general took the black eyes and the black whiskers as the distinguishing characteristics of a very good-looking young man; a man in a most unexceptionable position; a man to be made much of by every family in which there were daughters to marry and sons to plant out in life.

Mr. Walgrave allowed this gentleman to engross the attention of his betrothed just as long as he chose. He fully knew the strength of the chain by which he held Augusta Vallory, and that he was in no danger from Weston.

"I believe poor Weston was brought up to think that he was going to marry me," she said to her lover one day, with contemptuous compassion. "His mother was a very foolish woman, who thought her children the most perfect creatures in the world. But Weston is really very good, and has always been quite devoted to papa and me. He owes everything to papa, of course. His father quarrelled with my grandfather, and got himself turned out of the firm. I have never heard the details of the story, but I believe he behaved very badly; and if papa hadn't taken Weston by the hand, his chances of advancement would have been extremely small. He is an excellent man of business, nowever, according to papa's account; and I think he is grateful."

"Do you? Do you think any one ever is grateful?" Mr. Walgrave inquired in his cynical tone. "I never met with a grateful man yet, nor heard of one, except that fellow Androcles—no, by the bye, it was the lion who was grateful, so Mr. Spectator's story counts for nothing. However, your cousin is, no doubt, an exception to the rule—he looks like it. Was the father transported?"

"Hubert! How can you be so absurd?"

"Well my dear Augusta, you said he did something very bad; and I inferred that it was defalcation of some kind, tending towards penal servitude."

"I believe the quarrel did arise out of money matters; but I should hope no member of *my* family would be dishonest."

"My dear girl, dishonesty crops up in all kinds of families; a dukedom will not protect you from the possibility. There are rogues in the peerage, I daresay. But I am not at all curious about Mr. Weston Vallory's father. The man himself is enough—I accept him as a fact."

"You really have a very impertinent manner of speaking about my family," Miss Vallory exclaimed with an aggrieved air.

"My dearest, if you expect that I am going to bow down and worship your family as well as yourself, you are altogether mistaken. It was you I wooed that sweet summer night at Ryde, not the whole race of Vallory. Upon that point I reserve the right to be critical."

"You seem to be quite prejudiced against Weston."

"Not at all. I will freely admit that I don't care very much for a man with such a brilliant complexion; but that is a mere capricious antipathy—like an aversion to roses—which I would hardly confess to any one but yourself."

The lovers frequently indulged in small bickerings of this kind, by which means Mr. Walgrave maintained, or supposed that he maintained, his independence. He did not bow down and worship; and it happened curiously, that Miss Vallory liked him all the better for his habitual incivility. She had been surfeited by the attentions of men who thought of her only as the heiress of Harcross and Vallory. This man, with his habitual sneer, and cool off-hand manner, seemed so much truer than the rest. And yet he was playing his own game, and meditating his own advantage; and the affection he had given her was so weak a thing, that it perished altogether under the influence of his first temptation.

In the course of the evening there was a discussion as to where Mr. Vallory and his daughter should go for the next six weeks. The father would gladly have stayed in Acropolis-square, and potted down to his office every day. There was always plenty of business for him, even in the long vacation, and it was nearer his heart than any of the pleasures of life; but Augusta protested against such an outrage of the proprieties.

"We should have fever, or cholera, or something, papa," she said. "That kind of thing always rages out of the London season."

"The London death-rate was higher last May than in the preceding August, I assure you," urged Mr. Vallory.

"My dear papa, it is simply impossible. Let us go to the Stapletons. You know it is an old promise."

"I hate staying at country houses: breakfasting with a herd of strangers every morning; and hearing billiard-balls going two hours after one has gone to bed; and not being able to find a corner where one can write a letter; and being perpetually driven about on pleasure jaunts; doing ruined abbeys, and waterfalls; not a moment's peace. All very well for young people; but actual martyrdom when one is on the wrong side of fifty. You can go to Hayley if you like, Augusta; I would much rather go to Eastbourne."

"In that case, I will go too, papa," replied Miss Vallory. "It's rather a pity you lent the villa to the Filmers; it would have been nice to have the *Arion*."

"You can have the *Arion* at Eastbourne," said Mr. Vallory. "I didn't lend the yacht to the Filmers."

"Very well, papa; let us go to Eastbourne. And Hubert can come down to us—can't you, Hubert?"

"I shall be delighted, of course, to be down for a day or two."

"A day or two!" exclaimed Miss Vallory. "Why shouldn't you spend all September with us? You can have nothing to do in London."

"My dear Augusta, I came back to town on purpose to work. I can never do much good except in my own rooms, with my books of reference at hand."

He rather shrank from the idea of Eastbourne—the half-mile or so of parade—the band—the dull narrow round of seaside life. Ryde had been very agreeable to him last year, though his life had been the same kind of thing; but to-night he thought of such an existence with a strange aversion. Indeed, it seemed to him just now that nothing would be so pleasant as to bury himself in his chambers, with his books for his sole companions.

"But it is preposterous to think of working all through September," urged Augusta, with a somewhat heightened colour. "You really must come; the sea-air will do you a world of good. We shall have the *Arion*; and you are so fond of yachting."

"Yes, I am very fond of yachting; but I scarcely feel equal to the gaieties of a watering-place. I would rather vegetate in the Temple."

"But Eastbourne is not a gay place. It is the place of places for an invalid, if you still profess to be one."

"My dear Augusta, if you command me to come, I will come at any hazard to my professional advancement."

"Come and go just as you like, Walgrave," said Mr. Vallory. "You're quite right to stick to your books; that *Cardinum versus Cardinum* is a great case, and if you come out strong with your precedents, you'll carry everything before you.—Don't be jealous of his work, Augusta; he means to make you a judge's wife one of these days. Weston can dance attendance upon you."

"I don't dance," said Weston; "but I shall be most happy to be useful to my cousin."

"And, by the way, Weston, as there's not much doing at the office just now, you might run down to Eastbourne to-morrow and see if there's a house to be had that would suit us," Mr. Vallory said coolly. He had made the young man's fortune, and had a knack of ordering him about in this way.

Weston bowed. "I have two or three interviews for to-morrow," he said; "but I can make Jones attend to the people. I don't know that I am quite up in a house-agent's duties; but I suppose I shall know instinctively the kind of thing you want."

"Instinctive fiddlesticks!" Mr. Vallory exclaimed, impatiently. "Augusta will give you a sheet of paper with a memorandum of the accommodation wanted."

Mr. Walgrave smiled, congratulating himself upon his exemption from house-hunting. He felt a malicious delight in beholding Weston Vallory, one of the most conceited men he knew, charged with these ignominious services, while he, the rightful slave, went free. "May all imaginable blessings descend upon the revered heads of the *Cardinums*!" he said to himself.

At a quarter to eleven o'clock he wished his betrothed and her father good-night. Weston took his departure at the same time, bound for the Charing-cross station, whence a midnight train would convey him to Norwood. It was a clear, moonlit night. Even the Acropolis-square houses were tolerable in that mellow atmosphere, with solitary tapers twinkling here and there in upper chambers, tenanted by a charwoman in charge, or a lonely scullion. There was a perfume of mignonette, a faint rustling of the sycamores in the enclosure, which reminded Hubert Walgrave dimly of the Brierwood garden.

"Do you mean to walk home?" Weston asked, as the two men left the house together.

"I don't care much whether I walk or ride. If I see a hansom, I daresay I shall hail it. Are you going to walk to the station?"

"I make a point of walking six miles a day, and I shall be very glad of your company on the way. We go the same road, I know."

Mr. Walgrave submitted. He was a man somewhat given to strong antipathies, and Weston Vallory was one of his strongest.

"Confound the snob!" he thought; "what makes him fasten himself on to me, I wonder?"

He had no occasion to wonder long. The drift of his companion's conversation soon convinced him that Weston Vallory wanted to pump him: to get at the history of his eight weeks' holiday—to test his feelings in regard to his betrothed—to find out anything there was to be found out, in fact, in a gentleman-like way. But Mr. Weston might just as well have tried to pump Lord Burleigh, or Lord Bacon, had he been contemporary and on pumping terms with those distinguished noblemen. Hubert Walgrave betrayed no more of the secrets of his inner man than if he had been deaf and dumb; and yet he was civil, aggravatingly civil, and left Weston at the gates of the station oppressed with a sense of failure.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. WALGRAVE RELIEVES HIS MIND.

MR. WALGRAVE dined again with his betrothed before the Vallorys left town; walked in the broad walk in Kensington-gardens with her one afternoon; rode to Wimbledon with her one morning; and on Saturday had the privilege of seeing her off by the Eastbourne train—express the greater part of the way—with her father and her own maid, Tullion, a tall, strong-minded female, of superior birth and education—superior to her status

of lady's-maid, that is to say—whose parents had suffered reverses, and who was very fond of holding forth upon the luxuries and amenities of her early home.

All the luggage had gone the day before. Tullion only carried her mistress's dressing-bag, in case Miss Vallory should be seized with a desire to use her ivory-backed hair-brushes, or her ivory glove-stretchers, or to write a letter between London and Eastbourne. The dressing-bag contained everything that could have been wanted during a trip to America; but it was Tullion's duty to be prepared for all emergencies. One footman and a convey of housemaids had gone down the day before; the cook, butler, and another man came second-class by this train, after serving a ceremonious luncheon in Acropolis-square, in order that there should be no hitch in the domestic arrangements of either town or seaside—no awkward hiatus in Mr. Vallory's state. His own brougham brought him to the London station; his own barouche would meet him at Eastbourne. The lovers had ten minutes' leisure at the station, in which to renew their vows of eternal constancy, had they been so minded; but being neither of them sentimentally disposed, they beguiled the time by conversation of a commonplace order. Only towards the last did Miss Vallory touch upon personal topics.

"How soon are we to see you again, Hubert?" she asked.

"I think in the course of next week; but I had better not pledge myself to a given day. You may be sure I shall come directly I can. And I shall run down by this 3.30 train, and take my chance of finding you at home when I arrive."

"I cannot understand why you should not come down at once, and stay with us altogether."

"That is as much as to say you cannot understand why I am not an utterly idle man, my dear Augusta."

"I don't wish you to idle; but at this time of year you really cannot have any serious work."

"You heard what your father said about Cardium v. Cardium."

The bell rang before Miss Vallory could argue the point any farther. Her place had been taken by Tullion, the maid, who travelled in the same carriage as her mistress, in case Miss Vallory should faint, or require the ivory hair-brushes, or wrench a button off her glove. Hubert Walgrave handed her to her place, lingered at the carriage door to say a word or two, pressed the daintily-gloved hand in the orthodox fashion, and stood with lifted hat while the Eastbourne-Bognor-Lewes train steamed slowly off. When it was quite gone, he loitered on the platform for a minute or so, in a thoughtful mood, and then carried himself and his perplexities away in a hansom.

In spite of all he had said to Miss Vallory, he did not work

very diligently in the interests of his Cardimums that Saturday afternoon. He seemed to have an idle fit upon him, and loitered about in a desultory way; tried to read for an hour or so in his rooms by the river; but ended by throwing his books aside savagely; and went out of doors again, strolling westward, in an utterly purposeless and unprofitable manner, thinking—thinking of a Kentish homestead, and one fair young face; not the face of which he had a right to think.

In Cockspur-street he came to a sudden halt, his restless eye caught by the glitter of a jeweller's window. The dazzling wares were displayed, though London was empty, and the world of Cockspur-street had in a manner ceased to exist—had entered upon its annual hibernation. Locketts and bracelets, brooches and earrings, twinkled in the radiance of the westward sloping sun; marvellous devices in coral courted the eye of the connoisseur; a chaste selection of diamonds hinted at the wealth within. Mr. Walgrave, who was not given to gaping before shop windows, made a dead stop at this, staring at the splendid follies meditatively.

"I should like to give her something," he said to himself; "something as a—*as a* souvenir. I have caused her only too much pain; why should I not give her one half-hour of innocent pleasure? And it comes natural to a woman to be fond of these things. But I think she would hardly care for anything unless there were a sentiment associated with it. A locket, for instance—I suppose that would be the right kind of thing—a locket, with my photograph in it. She is simple enough and loving enough to value my unworthy countenance. And I am rather better-looking in a photograph than in the flesh—that is one comfort. There are some men whom the sun always shows at their worst, exaggerating every wrinkle; but me Helois treats kindly."

He had almost decided the point to his own satisfaction, and was going into the shop, when he stopped suddenly, turned on his heel, and walked a few paces farther, still meditating.

"How about aunt Hannah?" he asked himself. "There's the rub. If I were to send Grace my likeness, she must surely see it. What is there which those piercing eyes of hers do not see? And yet I must be the clumsiest of Lotharios if I can't cheat aunt Hannah. What were such sharp-eyed, all-seeing people created for, except to be duped egregiously, sooner or later? Yes; I think I am a match for aunt Hannah."

He turned back again, and this time went straight to the jeweller's counter. He selected a locket—the handsomest, or the one that pleased him best, in the shop: a massive dead-gold locket, oval, with an anchor in large, rich-looking pearls on the back; such a jewel as a man would scarcely choose for a farmer's

daughter, unless he had sunk very far down that pit from which extrication is so difficult and so rare. He turned the locket over in his fingers thoughtfully after he had chosen and paid for it.

"I suppose, now," he said to the shopman, "you could make me a false back to this thing, and put a portrait into it in such a manner that its existence need only be known to the owner of the locket?"

The shopman replied diffusely, to the effect that the thing was practicable, but would be troublesome, requiring great nicety of adjustment, and so on, and so on, and would be, of course, expensive.

"I don't care about a pound or two, more or less," said Mr. Walgrave. "I should like the thing done, if it can be done neatly. There must be a secret spring, you understand, in the style one reads about in novels. I never saw it in real life; but I have a fancy for trying the experiment. You can send to me for the photograph in a day or two; and the sooner you can let me have the locket the better."

He tossed his card onto the counter and departed, more interested in this trifling purchase than he had been in anything for a long time.

"It is a relief to do something that will please her," he thought.

It was a relief; but he was not the less restless and uneasy. The Cardimum case had no charm for him. New briefs, which had accumulated during the last fortnight of his absence, failed to interest him. He had been less than a week away from Brierwood, yet it seemed as if that ancient garden in Kent were divided from him by the space of a lifetime. His common life, which until this time had seemed to him all-sufficient for a man's happiness, was out of tune.

He hardly knew what to do with himself. After the excuses he had made about Eastbourne he could not go abroad; yet he would like to have rushed headlong to some wild out-of-the-way village in the Tyrol, and to spend his autumn climbing unfamiliar mountains. He fancied he could get rid of his infatuation in some remote region such as that; but, chained to London, in the dull dead season of the year, there was no hope of cure. Grace Redmayne's image haunted him by day and by night, mixed itself with every dream, came between him and his books, pushed Cardimum *v.* Cardimum from their stools.

Would he not have been safer at Eastbourne, in the society of his affianced, living the life of gentility by the seaside? He could hardly fail to ask himself this question. Yes; he would be safer, most assuredly, walking that narrow pathway, his footsteps guarded from all possibility of wandering. He would be safer; but he felt that such a life just now would be simply unendurable.

The commonplace talk, the narrow mind—narrow, though it was stored with stray lines from Tennyson and Owen Meredith, and had been enriched by a careful perusal of every book which a young lady of position ought to read; narrow, although its culture during the educational period had cost from two to three hundred a year—from these he shrank as from a pestilence; in plain words, he felt that an unbroken week of his future wife's company would be the death of him.

And when they were married, what then? Well, then, of course, it would be different. No man—above all a successful barrister—need see enough of his wife to be bored by her companionship. Nor can a man's wife, unless she is inherently obnoxious to him, ever be utterly uninteresting. They have so many ideas in common, so many plans and arrangements—petty, perhaps, but still absorbing for the moment—to discuss and settle,—the list of guests for a dinner-party; the way-bill of their autumn pilgrimage; the name of their last baby; the pattern of new carpets; the purchase or non-purchase of a picture at Christie's. The wife is only a necessary note—the subdominant—in the domestic scale.

But the long days of courtship, when there is no fervent love in the soul of the lover; the long summer evenings, when he is bound to stroll with his chosen one by the calm gray sea; when to talk too much of his own prospects and plan of life would be to appear worldly; when he is bound, in fact, to complete his tale of love-making, to produce the given number of bricks with ever so little straw—those days are the days of trial; and happy is he who can pass through them unscathed to that solemn morning which clenches the bargain with joyous ringing of bells, and gay procession of bridesmaids, and Mendelssohn's Wedding March, and transforms the exacting betrothed into the submissive wife.

"I have not the slightest doubt we shall get on very well together when we are married," Mr. Walgrave said to himself; "but the preliminary stage is up-hill work. I know that Augusta is fond of me, in her way; but O, what a cold way it seems after the touch of Grace Redmayne's little hand, the look in Grace Redmayne's eyes! Thank God, I did my duty in that affair, and was open and above-board from the first."

There was nothing in the world to delay Mr. Walgrave's visit to Eastbourne during the following week, except his own caprice; but he had a fancy for waiting until that locket he had bought in Cockspur-street was ready for him. He selected the photograph which represented him at his best, had it carefully painted by an expert hand, and sent it to the jeweller. At the end of the week the locket was brought to him. The spring

worked admirably. On opening the golden case, there appeared a bunch of forget-me-nots in blue enamel; but on pressing a little knob between the locket and the ring attached to it, the dainty little enamelled picture opened like the back of a watch, and revealed Hubert Walgrave's miniature. The contrivance was perfect in its way, the forget-me-nots a happy thought. The man to whom the work had been intrusted had taken the liberty to suppose that the trinket must needs be a love-gift.

Hubert Walgrave was charmed with the toy, and had it packed, registered, and dispatched at once to "Miss Redmayne, Brierwood Farm, near Kingsbury, Kent." He wrote the address, and posted the little packet with his own hands, and then wrote Grace a formal letter, a letter which could bear the scrutiny of Mrs. Redmayne.

"My dear Miss Redmayne,—I experienced so much kindness from your family and yourself during my very pleasant visit to Brierwood, that I have been anxious to send you some little souvenir of that event. I know that young ladies are fond of trinkets, and I fancy that your kind aunt would prefer my sending my little offering to you rather than to herself. I have therefore chosen a locket, which I trust Mr. and Mrs. Redmayne will permit you to accept, in token of my gratitude for all the kindness I received under their hospitable roof.

"With all regards, I remain, my dear Miss Redmayne, very faithfully yours,

"HUBERT WALGRAVE."

He read the letter over, and blushed, ever so faintly, at his own hypocrisy. Yet what could he do? he wanted to give the dear girl just one little spark of pleasure. Upon a slip of paper he wrote: "*Il y a un ressort entre l'anneau et le médaillon; touchez le, et vous trouverez mon portrait;*" and enclosed the slip in his letter. Grace would open her own letter, no doubt, and the Redmaynes would hardly see that little slip of paper in an unknown tongue.

"And so ends the one romantic episode in my unromantic life," he said to himself, when he had posted the letter.

A day or two afterwards he made up his mind to pay that duty visit to Eastbourne; it was a thing that must be done sooner or later. It was already much later than Miss Vallory could possibly approve. He expected to be lectured, and went down to the quiet watering-place with a chastened spirit, foreseeing what awaited him.

The little sea-coast town, with its umbrageous boulevards and dainty villas, was looking very gay and bright as he drove through it on his way to the habitation of the Vallory's, of course one of the largest and most expensive houses fronting

the summer sea. One of the newest also: the bricks had still a raw look; the stucco appeared to have hardly dried after the last touch of the mason's trowel. Other houses of the same type straggled a little way beyond it, in a cheerless and unfinished condition. It looked almost as if the Acropolis-square mansion had been brought down by rail, and set up here with its face to the sea. The unfinished houses, of the same pattern, seemed to have strayed off into a field, where the strange scentless flora of the sea-coast, chiefly of the birch-broom order, still flourished. It was what Sydney Smith has called the "knuckle-end" of Eastbourne, but designed to become the Belgravia of that town. Was not Belgravia itself once a "knuckle-end"?

There was a drawing-room, spacious enough for a church, sparsely furnished with "our cabriole suite at thirty-seven guineas, in carved Italian walnut and green rep;" a balcony that would have accommodated a small troop of infantry; and everywhere the same aspect of newness and rawness. The walls still smelt of their first coat of paint, and plaster-of-paris crumbs fell from the ceilings now and then in a gentle shower.

The Acropolis-square footman ushered Mr. Walgrave into the drawing-room, where he found his betrothed trying a new piece on a new Erard piano, in a new dress—an elaborate costume of primrose cambric, all frillings and puffings and flutings, which became her tall slim figure. She wore a broad blue ribbon round her throat, with a locket hanging from it—a locket of gold and gems, her own monogram in sapphires and diamonds; and the sight of it reminded him of that other locket. Grace Redmayne had received his gift by this time: but there had been no acknowledgment of it as yet when he left London. Indeed, no letter from Brierwood could reach him directly, since he had never given the Redmaynes his London address. They could only write to him through John Wort.

Mr. Walgrave had not been mistaken about the impending lecture, but he took his punishment meekly, only murmuring some faint reference to *Cardium versus Cardium*—so meekly, in fact, that Augusta Vallory could scarcely be hard upon him.

"You may imagine," she remonstrated in conclusion, "that I find a place of this kind very dull without you."

"I am afraid you will find it much duller with me," Mr. Walgrave replied drearily; "whatever capacity for gaiety I may possess—which, at the best, I fear, is not much—is always paralysed by the seaside. I have enjoyed a day or two at Margate, certainly, once or twice in my life; there is something fresh and enjoyable about Margate; an odour of shrimps and high spirits; but then, Margate is considered vulgar, I believe."

"Considered vulgar!" cried Miss Vallory, with a shudder. "Why, it is Houndsditch by the sea!"

"If Margate were in the Pyrenees, people would rave about it," her lover replied coolly. "I have been happy at Ryde, as you know," he went on in his most leisurely manner, but with a little drop in his voice, which he had practised on juries sometimes in breach-of-promise cases, and which did duty for tenderness; "but with those two exceptions, I have found the sea-side—above all, the genteel seaside—a failure. The more genteel, the more dreary. If one does not admit Houndsditch and the odour of shrimps, the pestilence of dulness is apt to descend upon our coasts. Cowes, of course, is tolerable; and I rather like Southsea—the convicts are so interesting; and where there are ships in the offing, there is always amusement for the Cockney who prides himself upon knowing a brig from a brigantine."

Discoursing in this languid manner, Augusta and her affianced beguiled the time until dinner. Mr. Walgrave was not eager to rush down to the beach and gather shells, or to seek some distant point whence to take a header into the crisp blue waves, after the manner of the enthusiastic excursionist, who feels that while he is at the sea, he cannot have too much of a good thing. He lounged in the balcony, which was pleasantly sheltered by a crimson-striped awning, and talked in his semi-cynical way to his betrothed, not by any means over-exerting himself in the endeavour to entertain her.

"The *Arion* is here, I suppose," he remarked by and by.

"Yes. I have been out in her a good deal."

"With your father?"

"Not very often. Papa gives himself up to laziness at the sea-side. I have had Weston with me."

"Happy Weston!"

"As the happiness he may have enjoyed was quite open to you, I don't think you need affect to envy him."

"My dear Augusta, I envy him not only the happiness, but the capacity for enjoying it. You see, I am not the kind of man for a 'tame cat.' Weston Vallory is; indeed, to my mind, he seems to have been created to fill the position of a fine Persian with a bushy tail, or an Angora with pink eyes."

"You are remarkably complimentary to my relations at all times," said Miss Vallory with an offended air.

"My dear girl, I consider the mission of a tame cat quite a lofty one in its way; but you see it doesn't happen to be my way. A man who trains his whiskers as carefully as your cousin Weston, lays himself out for that sort of thing. Have you been far out?"

"We have been as far as the Wight. We went to the

regatta at Ryde the other day, and had luncheon with the Filmers, who are intensely grateful for the villa."

"Then my Lady Clara Vere de Vere has not found the time heavy on her hands."

"Not particularly. I have ridden a good deal."

"With Weston?"

"With Weston. You envy him *that* privilege, I suppose?" This with a little contemptuous toss of the splendid head, and an angry flash of the hazel eyes. If Hubert Walgrave had been in love with his future wife, that little angry look would have seemed to him more bewitching than the sweetest smile of a plainer woman; but there was another face in his mind, eyes more beautiful than these, which had never looked at him angrily. He contemplated Augusta Vallory as coolly as if she had been a fine example of the Spanish school of portraiture—a lady by Velasquez.

"Upon my honour, I think you grow handsomer every time I see you," he said; "but if you ask me whether I envy Weston the delight of riding through dusty lanes in August, I am bound to reply in the negative. Man is essentially a hunting animal, and to ride without anything to ride after seems to me unutterably flat. If we were in the sires now, in November, I should be happy to hazard my neck three or four days a week in your society."

"But you see it is not November; if it were, I have no doubt I should be told the duties of a barrister must prevent your wasting any time upon me during that month."

With such gentle bickerings the lovers amused themselves until the ringing of the dressing-bell, when Miss Vallory handed her affianced over to the custody of the chief butler, and went upstairs to array herself for the small family gathering. Mr. Walgrave found himself presently in a roomy bed-chamber—walls and ceilings painfully new, grate slightly at variance with its setting, bells a failure, windows admirably constructed for excluding large bodies of air and admitting draughts, furniture of the popular sea-side type—brand-new Kidderminster carpet of a flaring pattern, rickety Arabian bedstead, mahogany wardrobe with doors that no human power could keep shut, everything marble-topped that could be marble-topped; no pin-cushion, no easy-chair, no writing-table, and a glaring southern sun pouring in upon a barren desert of Kidderminster.

"So Weston has been very attentive—has been doing my duty, in short," Mr. Walgrave said to himself as he dressed. "I wonder whether there's any chance of his cutting me out; and if he did, should I be sorry? It would be one thing for me to jilt Augusta, and another for her to throw me over. Old Vallory would hardly quarrel with me in the latter event; on the con-

trary, it would be a case for solatiura. He could hardly do enough for me to make amends for my wrongs. But I don't think there's much danger from my friend Weston; and after all I have quite done with that other folly—put it out of my mind, as a dream that I have dreamed: it is gone, 'like the chaff of the summer threshing floors.'"

He went downstairs presently, and found Mr. Vallory in the drawing-room, large and stolid, with a vast expanse of shirt-front, and a double gold eye-glass on the knob of his aquiline nose, reading an evening paper.

This of course offered a delightful opening for conversation, and they began to talk in the usual humdrum manner of the topics of the hour. Parliament was over—it was the indignant letter season, and the papers were teeming with fervid protests against nothing particular. Extortionate innkeepers in the Scottish highlands, vaccination *versus* non-vaccination, paterfamilias bewailing the inordinate length of his boys' holidays, complaints of the administration of the army, outcries for reform in the navy, jostled one another in the popular journals; and Mr. Vallory, being the kind of man who reads his newspaper religiously from the beginning to the end, had plenty to say about these things.

He was a heavy pompons kind of man, and Mr. Walgrave found his society a dead weight at all times; but never had he seemed so entirely wearisome as on this particular August evening, when less aristocratic Eastbourne was pacing the parade gaily, breathing the welcome breeze that set landwards with the sinking of the sun. Hubert Walgrave felt as if he could have walked down some of his perplexities, had he been permitted to go out and tramp the lonely hills, Beachy-Head way, in the sun-set; but in that lodging-house drawing-room, sitting on the creaky central ottoman contemplating his boots while Mr. Vallory's voice droned drearily upon the subject of army reform, and "what we ought to do with our Armstrong guns, sir," and so on, and so on, his troubles sat heavy upon him.

Weston came in presently, the very pink and pattern of neatness, with the narrowest possible white tie, and the air of having come to a dinner party. He had slept down by the afternoon express, he told his uncle, after his day's work in the City.

"There's an attentive nephew!" exclaimed Mr. Vallory senior; "does a thorough day's work in the Old Jewry, and then comes down to Eastbourne to turn over the leaves of his cousin's music, while I take my after-dinner nap, and is off to the City at a quarter to eight in the morning, unless he's wanted here for yachting or riding. Take care he doesn't cut you out, Walgrave."

"If I am fore-doomed to be cut out," Mr. Walgrave answered with his most gracious smile, "Mr. Weston Vallory is welcome to his chance of the advantages to be derived from the transaction. But the lady who has honoured me by her choice is in my mind as much above suspicion as Cæsar's wife ought to have been."

The young lady who was superior to Cæsar's wife came into the room at this moment, in the freshest and crispest of white muslin dresses, dotted about with peach-coloured satin bows, just as if a flight of butterflies had alighted on it. She gave Weston the coolest little nod of welcome. If he had really been a favourite Persian cat, she would have taken more notice of him. He had brought her some music, and a batch of new books, and absorbed her attention for ten minutes, telling her about them; at the end of which time dinner was announced, to Mr. Walgrave's infinite relief. He gave Augusta his arm, and the useful Weston was left to follow his uncle, caressing his whiskers meditatively, as he went, and inwardly anathematising Hubert Walgrave's insolence.

The dinner at Eastbourne was as the dinners in Acropolis-square. Mr. Vallory's butler was like Mr. Merdle's, and would not bate an ounce of plate for any consideration whatever; would have laid his table with the same precision, one might suppose, if he had been laying it in Pompeii on the night of the eruption, with an exact foreknowledge that he and his banquet-table were presently to be drowned in a flood of lava. So the table sparkled with the same battalions of wine-glasses; the same property tankards, which no one ever drank from, blazed upon the sideboard, supported by a background of presentation salvers; the same ponderous silver dishes went round in ceremonial procession, with the entrées which Mr. Walgrave knew by heart. Mr. Vallory's cook was an accomplished matron, with seventy guineas a year for her wages; but she had not the inexhaustible resources of an Oude or a Gouffé, and Hubert Walgrave was familiar with every dish in her catalogue, from her *consommé aux œufs* to her apple-fritters. He ate his dinner, however, watched over with tender solicitude by the chief butler and his subordinates—ate his dinner mechanically, with his thoughts very far away from that sea-side dining-room.

After dinner came music and a little desultory talk; a little loitering on the balcony, to watch the harvest moon rise wide and golden over a rippling sea; then a quiet rubber for the gratification of Mr. Vallory; then a tray with brandy and seltzer, sherry and soda, a glass of either refreshing mixture compounded languidly by the two young men; and then a general good-night.

"I suppose you would like to go out in the *Arion* to-morrow."

Augusta said to her lover, as he held the drawing-room door open for her departure.

"I should like it above all things," replied Mr. Walgrave; and he did indeed feel as if, tossing hither and thither on that buoyant sea, he might contrive to get rid of some part of his burden.

"It is a species of monomania," he said to himself, "and I daresay is as much the fault of an over-worked brain as an actual affair of the heart. Who can tell what form a man's punishment may take if he drives the intellectual steam-engine just a little too hard? The truth is, I want more rest and complete change. I wish to Heaven I could get away to the Tyrol; but that's impossible, I am bound hand and foot, unless I like to fly in the face of fortune, and offend Augusta Vallory."

He did not fly in the face of fortune. He went out in the Arion on the next day and the next, and even rode Weston's chestnut mare in the dusty lanes, to oblige Miss Vallory, while the owner of the beast sat in an office, where the thermometer was at seventy-five, writing rough draughts of letters to be copied by inferior hands, and interviewing important clients.

They went to Pevensey Castle together, and dawdled about among the ruined walls; they went to Beachy Head, and heard wondrous stories of distressed barks and rescued cargoes, and the wrongful awards of London average-staters, from the guardians of the point. They got rid of the days in a manner that ought to have been delightful to both of them, since they were almost always together, and Mr. Walgrave made himself more agreeable than usual.

This lasted for about ten days; but at the end of the tenth he discovered suddenly that he must go back to Cardimum *versus* Cardimum, and stuff his brain with more precedents; nor would he listen to any arguments which Miss Vallory could urge to detain him. She submitted ultimately, and made no show of her regret; but she really was grieved and disappointed, for she was fonder of him than she cared to let him see.

CHAPTER XV.

"DOST THOU LOOK BACK ON WHAT HATH BEEN?"

AFTER Hubert Walgrave's departure, the entire story of Grace Redmayne's life could be told in three words: "He was gone." She abandoned herself utterly to the bitterness of regret. She went to and fro by day, and lay down to rest at night, with

one great sorrow in her heart—a childish grief perhaps at the worst, but none the less bitter to this childish soul. Nor had she any friendly ear into which to pour her woes. On the contrary, she had to keep perpetual watch and ward over herself, lest she should betray her foolish secret. It was the old story of the worm in the bud, and the damask cheek soon began to grow wan and pale. So changed and haggard, indeed—so faded from her nymph-like beauty did the girl become, that even Mrs. James Redmayne's unsentimental eyes perceived the difference: and that worthy matron told her husband, with some anxiety of tone, that their niece must be ill.

"She's going the way of her poor mother, I'm afraid, Jim," she said. "She's fainted dead off more than once since that evening in Clevedon Chase. I let her do a hand's turn in the dairy the day before yesterday; for she get's restless and fretful sometimes, for want of work—lolloping about all day, reading novels or playing the piano. It was light work enough—making up a bit of butter into fancy shapes—swans, and such-like—for it isn't likely I'd give her anything heavy to do; but when she'd been standing in the dairy half an hour or so, she went off all of a sudden as white as a sheet of paper, and would have gone flat down on the bricks, if I hadn't caught her in my arms; and a regular bother I had to bring her round, too. Depend upon it, Mr. Humphreys was right, and there's something wrong with her heart."

"Poor little lass!" murmured the farmer, tenderly. He remembered his niece when she had been indeed a little lass, and had sat upon his knee peering into the mysteries of a turnip-shaped silver watch—a fragile flower-like child, whom he used to touch tenderly with his big clumsy hands, as if she had been an exotic. "Poor little lass! that seems hard though, Hannah, if there's anything amiss. She's so young, and so bright, and so pretty—as personable a young woman as you can see between this and Tunbridge. And there's her father working for her over yonder. I think it would clean break Rick's heart if he were to come back and find Gracey missing. We'd best do something, hadn't we, Hannah—take her up to some London doctor, eh?"

"We mig't do that," Mrs. Redmayne answered, thoughtfully, "when the hops are gathered. I couldn't spare a day between this and then, if it was a matter of life and death, as you may say; and thank God it isn't that! The girl ain't strong, and she's subject to fainting-fits; but there mayn't be anything serious in it, after all."

"You must take her up to London, Hannah, to see some top-sawyer of a doctor, as soon as ever the hopping's over."

"I don't mind doing that. It's no use fidgiting ourselves with Mr. Humphrey's fancies. If you've got a sick headache, he looks

at you as solemn as if he was thinking of giving a hint to the undertaker."

"I say, mother," Mr. James Redmayne remarked to his spouse, after a pause, "you don't think the girl's got anything on her mind, do you? She ain't fretting about anything, is she?"

"Fretting about anything! Mercy's sakes, what's she got to fret about? All her victuals found for her, and no need to soil the tips of her fingers, unless she likes. She's never known a trouble in her life, except her father leaving her; and she's got the better of that ever so long. What can put such rubbish into your head, father?"

"Well, I don't know; girls are apt to have fancies, you see. There was that chap, Mr. Walgry, for instance, hanging about her, and talking to her a good deal, off and on. He may have put some foolish notions into her head—may have flattered her a bit perhaps, and made her think he was in love with her."

Mr. Redmayne made these observations in a dubious tone, and with a somewhat guilty feeling about his own conduct during that one week of his wife's absence. He had left those two so entirely free to follow their own devices, while he made the most of his brief span of liberty. The partner of his fortunes took him up sharply.

"Hanging about her, indeed!" she exclaimed. "I never allowed any hanging about to go on under my nose; and I must say I always found Mr. Walgry quite the gentleman. Of course he did take *some* notice of Grace. There's no denying she's a pretty girl, and it isn't likely she'd be passed over like a plain one. But I don't believe he ever said a foolish word to her, or behaved any way unbecoming a gentleman."

"If you say so, Hannah, I make no doubt you're quite correct in your views," the farmer replied, submissively; "only I don't like to see Gracey hanging her head—it don't seem natural."

"It's weakness, that's what it is, James. If she'd only drink the hop-tea I make her, she'd pick up her strength fast enough. There's nothing finer than a tumbler of hop-tea every morning; but girls are so obstinate, and think that physic ought to be as sweet as sugar-plums."

So the discussion ended. Grace's health seemed variable. She looked brighter on some days than on others; made little efforts, in fact, to stifle her sorrow; put on an appearance of life and gaiety; and then relapsed and gave way altogether. When questioned by her aunt or uncle, she said she had a headache—they could never extort more from her than that. Once good-natured James Redmayne took her aside, and asked her, with simple earnestness that touched her keenly, if there were any trouble on her mind; but she answered him very much as her aunt had done on her behalf: *What could there be to trouble her?*

"You are all so kind to me, dear Uncle James," she said, "and if my father were only at home, I ought to be as happy as any girl in Kent."

It was rather a vague answer, but to James Redmayne it seemed a sufficient one. He went in to his wife with an air of mingled wisdom and triumph.

"I've got to the bottom of it all, mother," he said. "Gracey's still fretting for her father; she owed as much to me just now."

"More fool she, then!" exclaimed Mrs. James, who did not approve of confidence being reposed in her husband which had not first been offered to her. "Fretting won't bring Richard home a day the sooner, or earn him an ounce of gold-dust to bring back with him. She'd better drink my hop-tea, and keep up her health and good looks, so as to do him credit when he does come."

Mr. Walgrave had been gone three weeks—ah, what an age of sadness and regret!—when the parcel containing the locket came to Grace. A parcel directed in his hand—it was only too familiar to her from pencil-notes in some of the books he had lent her, and from the papers she had seen scattered about his table. Fortune favoured her in the receipt of the packet. She had gone out to take the letters from the postman that morning, expecting nothing, hoping for nothing. From *him* or of *him* she never thought to receive sign or token. Had he not told her many times, in the plainest words, that the story of their love must come to an end, like a book that is shut, on the day he left Brierwood? She was too simple-minded to imagine him capable of wavering. He had said that his honour compelled him to forsake her, and he would be faithful to that necessity.

Her heart gave a great leap when she saw the address on the little packet. She fled round the house like a lapwing, and did not stop to breathe till she was safe under the shadow of the cedar, in the spot where she had known such perilous happiness—with him. Then she sank down on the rustic bench, and with tremulous fingers tore open the little parcel.

A dainty case of dark-blue velvet, in itself a treasure to a girl so unsophisticated as Grace; a casket that opened with a spring, revealing a large yellow gold locket set with pearls, reposing on a bed of white satin—a gem so beautiful that the sight of it took her breath away, and she sat gazing upon it, transfixed with womanly rapture.

She opened the locket, and looked at the little enamelled picture of forget-me-nots. Sweet, very sweet; but oh, how much she would have preferred his portrait, or even one little ring of his dark wavy hair. She laid the treasure on the bench beside her, and opened his letter, devouring it with wide-open luminous eyes.

The scrap of paper attracted her attention first: "There is a secret spring; touch it, and you will find my photograph." She gave a little cry of joy, and began to search for the spring, found it, and gave a louder cry of utter delight when she beheld the face of her lover. The skilful colourist had flattered Mr. Walgrave not a little: the pale dark complexion was Italianised; the gray eyes were painted in ultramarine; the face in the miniature looked from five to ten years younger than the original. But to Grace the picture was simply perfect. She perceived no flattery; the face, which was to her the noblest upon earth, was only idealised as she had idealised it in her own mind from the hour in which she began to love its owner. And yet, when Hubert Walgrave first came to Brierwood, she had seen nothing wonderful in his appearance, and had considered him decidedly middle-aged.

At last, after gazing at the miniature till her eyes grew dim, flooded with innocent tears—after kissing the glass that covered it with fond, foolish kisses—she touched the spring and shut the case, and then read her letter.

This disappointed her a little. It was evidently written to be read by her uncle and aunt. Not one word of that brief bright past; only a letter such as any grateful lodger might have written to his landlady's daughter. She shed a few tears.

"It was good of him to send me his picture," she said to herself. "But he is quite gone from me; I shall never, never see him again!"

The picture had kindled new hope in her breast; the letter destroyed it. There was some comfort, however, in being able to show this letter to her aunt, and to wear her locket in the light of day. She carried the little velvet case and her letter indoors, and went in quest of her aunt, whom she found in the dairy.

"O, aunty Hannah, I have had a letter and a present!"

"What, a pincushion or a bookmarker from one of your old schoolfellows, I'll lay, or some such trumpery? You girls are always fiddle-faddling about some such rubbish!"

"Look, aunty!" cried Grace, displaying the locket imbedded in white satin.

"Sure to goodness!" cried Mrs. James, staring at the trinket, "where did you get that?"

"From Mr. Walgrave, aunty, with such a kind letter."

Mrs. James snatched the letter from her niece's hand, and read it aloud, going over every word, and harking back every now and then to read a sentence a second time, in a deliberate way that aggravated Grace beyond measure. And then she turned from the letter to the locket, and examined it minutely, while Grace stood by in an agony, lest her clumsy fingers should hit upon the secret spring.

"It's a pretty thing enough," she said at last, "and must have cost a sight of money—pearls and all, for I suppose they're real; and I can't see as he had any call to send you such a thing. He paid for what he had, and there was no obligation on either side. Forget-me-nots too, as if it was for a young woman he was keeping company with. I don't half like such nonsense, and I doubt your uncle will be for sending it back."

"O, aunt," said Grace; and then began to cry.

"Lord bless me, child, don't be such a cry-baby. If you can get round your uncle to let you keep the locket you may. A present's a present, and I don't suppose Mr. Walgry meant any harm; he's too much a gentleman for that, leastways as far as I could see. All I hope is, he never went talking any nonsense to you behind my back."

"No, aunt, he never talked nonsense; he was always sensible, and he told me—something about himself. He's engaged to be married—has been engaged for ever so long."

"Well, it was fair and honourable of him to tell you that, anyhow. You can show the letter to your uncle at dinner-time; and if he likes you to keep the locket, I'm agreeable."

When dinner-time came, Mr. James, whose opinion upon most subjects was a mere reflection of his wife's, studied that worthy woman's countenance; and seeing her favourably disposed towards the gift and the giver, opined that his niece might accept Mr. Walgrave's present without any derogation to the family dignity. She must write him a pretty little letter of thanks, of course, showing off her boarding-school education, which Mr. Wort would no doubt forward to him, as he had happened to omit any address in his letter.

So Grace wore her locket in the face of mankind, on the first Sunday after the arrival of the packet; wore it on her muslin dress at church, with a shy consciousness that all the parish must be dazzled by its splendour—that the old rector himself, if his eyes were good enough, might break down in the midst of his sermon, overcome by a sudden glimpse of its gorgeousness. She wore it on a black ribbon under her dress secretly upon those days which her aunt called "workadays;" and at night she put it under her pillow. Hers was the early, passionate, girlish love, which is so near akin to foolishness; the Juliet love, which would have her Romeo cut out in little stars,

"And he will make the face of heaven so fine,
That all the world will be in love with night,
And pay no worship to the garish day."

The girl's spirits revived a little with the possession of this locket. She looked brighter and better, and her aunt forgot

her fears. September came to an end, and the hop-picking began; herds of tramps from the wilds of Hibernia, from the heart of the Seven-dials, from the wretchedest alleys in White-chapel and Bermondsey, came pouring in upon the fair Kentish country. Mrs. Redmayne was too busy to think much of Grace's health; and when the girl began to flag a little again, finding that life was dreary even with that portrait in her bosom, no one observed the change. She went off into rather a severe fainting-fit one afternoon; but there was no one at hand but Sally, the maid-of-all-work, who brought her round as best she might, and thought nothing of the business. She had fainted herself on a midsummer Sunday, when Kingsbury church was hotter than usual, and never went to that place of worship without a big blue bottle of smelling-salts.

Now in the dusky October evenings fitful patches of light glowed here and there on the landscape; and riding along narrow lanes, the traveller came ever and anon to a rustic encampment—a ragged family huddled round a fire, sunburnt faces turned towards him inquiringly as he passed, a bevy of tatterdemalion children darting out at him to ask for alms, and sharp cries of "Pitch us a copper, sir!" in the purest Cockney. The group, so picturesque at a distance, was sordid enough on inspection, and the traveller could but wish these nomads had better shelter. A ragged blanket perhaps, hung upon a couple of poles, made a rough tent here and there; but those who possessed so much luxury were the aristocrats of the community; the vulgar herd slept in the open, save on some lucky occasion, when a liberal farmer gave them the use of an empty barn.

James Redmayne was tender-hearted, and at Brierwood the wandering race fared luxuriously. He lent them old rick-covers for tents, and whatever barn he had empty was placed at their disposal. Grace took an interest in the little children, spent all her money in cakes, and robbed the baskets in the apple-loft for their benefit; carried the women great jugs of cold tea in the evenings, and helped and comforted them in many small ways, at the hazard of catching a fever, as her aunt frequently reminded her. In this particular season she was more than usually active in these small charities: that great sorrow in her heart was numbed a little by the sight of commoner sorrows. This year she was more tender than ever, the women thought—the old hands, who had known her in former years. She would sit for hours in a shady corner of a field, with a sick child in her arms, singing it to sleep with sweet, sad songs. The women used to look at her from a little distance, and talk together in whispers of her gentleness and her pale grave face.

"I'm afeard there's summat wrong," one stalwart matron said to another. "She were as gay as a bird last hop-picking."

She looks like my sister Mary, that went off into a consumption and died in the hospital—that white-like, and her hands that wasted that you might a'most see through 'em. And she such a sweet young thing, too! It do seem hard, that such as she should be took, and my old father, wot's a trouble to everybody and no more use of his limbs than a new-born infant, left behind to worrit."

One night, after a day spent almost entirely in the hop-fields, Grace discovered a great calamity—her locket was gone. The ribbon worn every day had been worn through at last by the sharp edge of the ring. It was round her neck when she undressed, with the two ends hanging loosely. Late as it was, she would have gone out and hunted for her treasure by moonlight—would have roused the hop-pickers, and bribed them to hunt for her; but the house was locked, and the keys under Mrs. James's pillow, and it was more than she dared to wake that vigilant housewife. So she went to bed quietly, and cried all night, and came downstairs next morning ashy pale, and with red swollen circles round her eyes, to tell of her loss.

Mrs. James flew into a passion on hearing the news.

"Lost it! you ought to be ashamed of yourself. What call had you to wear it on a workaday?" she cried.

Grace blushed crimson.

"I know it was very foolish of me, aunt Hannah; but—but—I was so fond of it!"

"Was there ever such a baby? Fond of it, indeed! You're fond of the piano your father gave you: I'm sure I wonder you don't wear that hanging round your neck—you're silly enough. And of course some of your blessed hop-pickers have stolen it; and serve you right. That comes of consorting with such low rabble."

"They couldn't have stolen it, aunt; I wore it under my dress; they couldn't have known anything about it."

"Stuff and nonsense! they're cunning enough to know anything. If you'd swallowed a sovereign, they'd know it was inside you. Besides, I daresay you took and pulled it out of your bosom to show to some of their rubbishing brats. You'll nurse yourself into the typhus fever or the smallpox one of these days, with nursing those ragamuffins; and a deal of use you'll be in the world without your good looks, considering as you can't so much as set the sponge for a batch of bread."

Grace was silent with the silence of guilt. Sitting under a hedge yesterday with one of those waifs of humanity in her lap, while its mother and a brood of bantlings from three years old upwards clustered round a hop-bin a few yards off, she had drawn the locket from her bosom and dangled it before the eyes of the little one, half to amuse the child, half for the pleasure

of looking at the thing which was the sole token left of her brief love-story.

Aunt Hannah, though unsympathetic in manner was by no means minded that the locket should be lost.

"It's a thankless task spending money upon *you*," she said; "and so I shall tell Mr. Walgry, if ever I set eyes on him again. Real gold, set with real pearls, and go and fool it away among a pack of hoppers."

After having given relief to her mind in this manner, she dispatched Jack and Charley and a farm-labourer to scour the country, under Grace's guidance. The girl was to point out to them every path she had taken, and every spot where she had rested throughout the previous day.

"But it's about as likely you'll find the moon lying in the grass as that locket," aunt Hannah remarked despairingly as they set out.

She proved only too true a prophet. The young men searched diligently, under Grace's direction—searched till dinner, and after dinner began again, and went on unflinchingly till tea-time; but without result. After tea the early twilight shrouded the farm, and it was too dark to look any longer. Uncle James had the hoppers collected at nightfall, and told them what had been lost, offering a reward of a couple of sovereigns to the man, woman, or child who would restore it; but they all made the same declaration, with every form of asseveration common to their class. No such thing had they seen.

"That's a lie," said James Redmayne, sturdily. "Some of you has seen it, and some of you has got it, or made away with it since last night. The locket's almost as large as the palm of my hand. You couldn't fail to see it lying anywheres; and my sons have been over every inch of ground my niece walked upon yesterday. It's hard you should take anything as belongs to her, for she's been a good friend to you all."

"That she *have*, sir!" the women cried with tremendous energy, and a desperate emphasis on the last word. And then came a confusion of shrill voices, all protesting that the owners thereof would not wrong Miss Redmayne to the extent of a sixpence.

Grace went to her room quite worn out by that weary day—the pacing too and fro, with lessening hope as the hours wore on. It was gone—the one solace that had cheered her life.

"I shall never see his face any more," she said to herself. "There is a fate against me."

CHAPTER XVI

"BUT IF THOU MEAN'ST NOT WELL."

AFTER the loss of the locket Grace Redmayne drooped visibly. Good-hearted uncle James did all in his power to recover the lost trinket: put the matter into the hands of the police; had inquiries made amongst London pawnbrokers, and so on; but without avail. Poor Grace wandered about the bare fields where the hop-vines had lately flourished, with her eyes fixed on the ground, like some melancholy spirit haunting the scene of an unhappy life. Aunt Hannah reprimanded her sharply from day to day for such foolishness.

"If the locket's lost, it's lost," she said philosophically; "and there's no use in grizzling about it. There's more lockets in the world than that; and if the balance is on the right side next quarter-day, I daresay your uncle will buy you a new one, perhaps with both our portergraffs, one on each side; and that'll be worth taking care of as a family keepsake — something to show your children by and by."

Grace gave a little involuntary shudder. A portrait of aunt Hannah, whom photography made unutterably grim, instead of that splendid face, those god-like eyes!

"It's very kind of you to think of that," the girl said, half crying; "but I should never care to have another locket please."

"O, very well! I suppose you think we couldn't give you anything as handsome as that; but, for my part, I should have thought you'd have set more store by a keepsake from one of your own family than a stranger's present."

"It isn't that, aunt. I've got your photograph, and uncle's, in my album, and I'm sure I value them. But I'll never wear another locket. There's something unlucky about them."

The year waned. October came to an end; and for various reasons that visit to the London physician, which James Redmayne and his wife had talked about, had not yet been made. To those who saw Grace every day, the gradual change in her was not so obvious as to cause immediate alarm. Nor were hard-working people like the Redmaynes on the watch for such slight symptoms as awaken terror in those who have sufficient leisure to be anxious. The girl rose at her usual time; took her place among her kindred at meals; went patiently through the routine of the long dull day, and never uttered a complaint.

She was completely unhappy, nevertheless. She had no companions of her own age, who might have taught her to shake off this foolish sorrow—no innocent gaieties to distract her mind.

The slow level life of a farmhouse was about the best possible existence in which to foster a sorrow such as hers.

She had written that epistle which her uncle James had spoken of as "a pretty little letter"—a very formal composition, supervised by the whole family. James Redmayne would fain have had her begin, "This comes hoping," a formula which he had used all his life, and firmly believed in as the essence of polite letter-writing. She had written to thank Mr. Walgrave for his very kind present, which was indeed very, *very* beautiful, and which she should value very much all her life. There were a great many "verys" in the letter; and it was written in her best boarding-school hand—with long loops to the *g*'s and *y*'s, after a *spécialité* of Miss Toulmin's—on the thickest and creamiest note-paper to be procured at Tunbridge Wells. Uncle James would have had a view of that polite resort at the top of the first page; but this his niece condemned as vulgar.

"Mr. Walgrave knows Tunbridge Wells, uncle," she said. "He can't want a picture of it on a penny sheet of paper—such bad paper, too, as they always print the views on."

No answer had come to this letter, which indeed needed none; but for a month after she sent it the girl had hoped, faintly, for some acknowledgment. With the dying out of this hope, and the loss of her locket, all was over; there was nothing left her except the blank future, in which that one beloved figure could have no part.

And her father—her father, whose letters had been more hopeful of late, telling of increasing good fortune, hinting even at the possibility of his return before another year was ended, with all the objects of his expedition fully realised; the father whose exile she had lamented so bitterly only a year ago—was he forgotten? No, not forgotten; only deposed to the second place in her heart. She thought of him very often, with a guilty sense of having wronged him by her love for another. But that first love of girlhood is an all-absorbing passion. She had hardly room in her mind for her father's image beside that other. If he could have returned at this moment to cheer and comfort her, she might perhaps have struggled bravely with her grief, and conquered it. He had been all the world to her in years gone by—father, mother, companion, friend; the pride and delight of her life; and in the rapture of reunion with him, that other image might have grown pale and shadowy, until it became only the memory of a girlish sorrow. But he did not come, and she went on thinking of Hubert Walgrave.

She had no hope—positively none—of ever seeing his face again. Day after day, in the misty November mornings, she awoke with the same void in her heart. The pain was almost worse than the pain of her awakening in the days that followed

her father's departure. That grief had at the worst been brightened by hope: this was quite hopeless.

Her aunt sent her to Kingsbury one fine afternoon in November, on some small errand to the single shop of the village — an errand which was designed rather to rouse the girl from her listlessness, and give her the benefit of a brisk walk, than to supply any positive need of the household.

"Anything's better for her than lolloping over a book," remarked Mrs. Redmayne, who regarded reading in every shape and form, except the ponderous Henry's Bible on a Sunday afternoon, as more or less a vice.

The walk was through those lanes and by those fields which she had walked so often with him; the way by which they had come together on that first Sunday afternoon, when he joined her in her return from church. How well she remembered it all! The landscape had changed since then, but was hardly less beautiful to the eye of a painter. The shifting shadows on the broad fallow, the tawny gold and crimson, brown and dun colour of the still lingering foliage; the very weeds in the hedge, and the dock-leaves in the ditch, fringed by dewdrops left from the morning mists, which a November sun had not been strong enough to disperse—all were beautiful.

A robin was singing with all its might on one of the bars of a gate Grace had to pass. She lingered for a few minutes to listen to him, watching the joyous bird with sad dreamy eyes.

"I wonder if birds have any sorrows," she thought; and then opened the gate gently, and went through into the lane.

It was a narrow gulley between two neglected hedges, where the blackberry-bushes grew high and rank, mixed with hazel and hawthorn, upon steep grassy banks which were bright with primroses in April. At the very entrance of the lane Grace stopped suddenly, with a little cry—stopped and clasped her hands upon her heart, which had a trick of beating furiously when she was agitated.

There was a figure advancing towards her—the tall figure of a man—the image that haunted all her thoughts—Hubert Walgrave. He saw her, evidently, and came on with swifter footsteps to meet her.

She would have behaved with the utmost propriety, no doubt, had he come to the gate at Brierwood, and she been prepared for his appearance ever so little; but at his coming upon her suddenly like this, all her fortitude left her; she fell upon his breast sobbing hysterically.

"My darling! my darling!"

For a few minutes he could hardly say any more than this, trying all the while to soothe and comfort her, as if she had been a frightened child—waiting very patiently until that mo-

lent emotion had worn itself out. Then he lifted her face tenderly, and looked at her.

"Why, Grace," he said, with a shocked look, "how sadly you are altered!"

"Am I?" she asked, smiling faintly. "I have not been very happy lately——"

"Has anything troubled you, my sweet one? has anything been going wrong at Brierwood?"

"O, no, no, it is not that. They are all well, and we have hopeful letters from my dear father. Only——"

"Only what, Grace?"

"I am so foolish, so wicked. I could not help being miserable. I thought I should never see you again."

"And was that thought enough to make you unhappy, dearest?"

"Yes."

"And to see me again, and to be with me, and to be my own for ever,—would that be happiness?"

The soft eyes looked at him,—O, so tenderly!

"You know that it would."

He bent down and kissed her.

"Then it shall be so, Grace," he said softly.

"But, O, you know it can never, never be! There is the other—the lady you are to marry."

"That lady shall not come between me and this faithful heart," he answered, holding her in his arms, and looking down at her with a proud happy smile. "Were she ten thousand times the woman she is, she should not part us, Grace, seeing that you are true to me, and that I love you with all my strength."

"True to you!" she murmured sadly. "I have lived for nothing except to think of you since you went away."

"And I have made it the business of my life to forget you, Grace, and have failed dismally. I made a vow never to look upon your face again; but the sweet face has never left me. It has followed me by day and night; and at last, after so many wasted struggles, I come back, just to see you once more—hoping to find you false, Grace; asked in church with some stalwart farmer; so that I might be disenchanted, and go away cured of my folly. Are you false, Grace? Is there any red-cheeked young farmer in the case?"

"A farmer!" the girl cried contemptuously. "If Sir Francis Clevedon asked me to be his wife, I should refuse him, for your sake."

Hubert Walgrave gave a little start.

"Sir Francis Clevedon!" he said. "What fancy puts that name into your head?"

"It was the name I used to think of oftenest before I saw

you," she answered with a smile. "I suppose every woman has her hero, and Sir Francis was mine. I have never seen him in my life, you know."

Mr. Walgrave's face, so bright before with a lover's triumph, had clouded over at the sound of the Clevedon name.

"You have never seen him? I have no ground for jealousy, then, I suppose? I daresay he is a very good-looking fellow! for Fortune rarely measures her gifts when she is in the giving mood. Nothing is too much for her favourites. But we won't waste our talk on him, Gracey; we have sweeter things to think of. My own, my dearest, is it really true that you love me, that this pale changed face has grown wan from sorrow for me?"

"There has been no other reason," she said shyly.

"And you are my own, Grace, all my own."

"You know that I am," she answered, looking up at him with clear candid eyes, that smote him to the heart with their innocence, "if—if you are willing to sacrifice those prospects you spoke of, and to give up the rich lady."

"My beloved, there is hardly anything in the world I would not surrender for your sake."

"And you will marry me?" she asked falteringly, the pale face covered with a burning blush. Even in her little world she had learned enough to know that all love-making, such as this does not tend towards marriage. Every village has its stories of broken faith and man's dishonour; and there had been such stories to be told of Kingsbury, even within Grace Redmayne's brief experience.

"I will do all that a man of honour should do, dearest. I will do everything that a man can do to make you happy, if you will only trust me."

"You know that I cannot help trusting you," she said; "I love you so much."

"Then it cannot be too soon, darling."

"What?" she asked, with a puzzled look.

"Our union."

"O, no, no; it must not be soon. It is too great a sacrifice for you to make. You might regret afterwards; and it would break my heart to know that I had come between you and the things you value. And then there is my father—dearly as I love you, I could do nothing without his knowledge."

"What, Grace! is this your boundless love? Am I to be secondary to a father? Think how very little old Capulet stood for, when once Juliet was in love with Romeo."

Grace smiled a little at this appeal. They had read *Romeo and Juliet* together one long summer afternoon in the orchard; and her lover had taught her to appreciate the beauties of the

text with a fuller comprehension than she had ever brought to it before.

"But I think Signor Capulet was rather a disagreeable kind of father," she said. "Mine is so good."

"My pet, I have no doubt he is as good a fellow as ever breathed; but he is at the antipodes, and I have a horror of long engagements. Life is not long enough for that kind of delay. Rely upon it, Romeo's and Juliet's was the true philosophy—wooded and won to-night, and wed to-morrow."

"Remember how fatal their marriage was!"

"*Absit omen*. We will try to resemble them in nothing but the fervour of our love, our utter trustfulness in each other. And now let us talk seriously. Take my arm, dear, and let us walk on a little way. Mild as the afternoon is, you are shivering."

He drew her shawl closer round her, pressed the little hand under his arm, and walked gently on, looking down at her.

"What a lucky fellow I was to meet you here just now—promiscuous, as my servant says! I took a fly from Tunbridge to Kingsbury, and walked on, meaning to invent some excuse for presenting myself at the farm as I came along. But I need not do that now; it will be wiser on the whole that I should not appear at Brierwood. We can arrange everything, you and I, darling, in half-an-hour, and carry out our plans afterwards, without arousing any one's suspicion."

The girl looked at him wonderingly! and then little by little, overcoming her objections one by one as they arose, he unfolded his scheme of their future.

He was prepared to make great sacrifices for her love—he did not define them; but to declare his marriage with her would be to blast his prospects. She would hardly desire that, he was sure.

"O, no, no, no," she faltered piteously! "but my father—you will place me right with him?"

"Of course, darling; but your father is a long way off now. There will be time enough to consider that difficulty when he is on his homeward voyage. We need only think of perplexities to be overcome in the present, and those are not many. You must be very secret, darling, very brave, and come away from Brierwood quietly some morning—say this day week. That will give me time for *my* preparations, and yours need be of the slightest order; for you can bring no more luggage than you can carry in your own hand. I will sleep at Tunbridge on the previous night, and meet you with a fly at Kingsbury at eight in the morning, in time for the nine o'clock train to London."

"To London!" echoed Grace, with a little shiver. "Are we to be married in London?"

"My dearest, everything is possible in London; there is no place like London for keeping a secret. But don't imagine that I am going to mew you up in a smoky city. I shall find a pretty nest for my bird somewhere in the suburbs, between this and Wednesday."

The whole scheme seemed fraught with terror to Grace. She loved him—O, so fondly! but even her love could hardly conquer her fear of that dim future. To leave the old familiar home—all the world she knew—and go forth with him an alien from her kin. If the marriage was to be secret, they might believe she had gone away to dishonour: and the thought that she should stand disgraced in the minds of her kindred was more than she could bear.

"I may tell my aunt and uncle that I am going away to be married, may I not?" she asked.

"Yes, darling; I will place no fetter upon you there; but remember, they must know nothing till you are gone. You can leave a letter behind you, telling them that you are going to be married, but not mentioning my name. They shall be enlightened by and by."

And thus by slow degrees, and with much tender pleading, he won her consent to his plan. She could not contemplate it without a strange terror—that rising early in the dim wintry morning, to creep like a criminal from the home of her childhood. But to be with him for ever and ever, with no more parting! She looked back at the sorrowful months of severance—the dreary, dreary days in which she had mourned him as one dead; and cried, with a sudden gush of tenderness,—

"What is there that I would not do for your sake? O yes, yes, I will come!"

"Spoken like my own brave girl! You remember that line I marked in your Tennyson—'Trust me all in all, or not at all?' You shall never repent your confidence, my sweetest. And we shall soon bring the roses back to those poor pale cheeks. Do you know, Gracey, this dull farmhouse life was killing you?"

They parted at last, after settling everything—parted because Grace dared stay no longer, and would have, as it was, a lost hour to account for in the best way she could to her aunt. This was Thursday, November the 4th; on Thursday, November the 11th, Grace was to slip out of the house quietly at seven o'clock, at which hour her uncle would have finished his breakfast, and gone out on his rounds of inspection; and her aunt would be busy in the dairy. She was to slip quietly away, by these very lanes. The distance to Kingsbury was an hour's walk at most; and by the turnstile that divided the lane from the road that skirted the common she would find her lover with a vehicle, ready to spirit her off. It would be safest for him not to come

nearer Brierwood than this, or he would have willingly spared her the lonely walk in the chill winter morning.

Even after her graver objections had been met and conquered, Grace did not yield her consent to this arrangement without some feeble womanly protest upon the subject of wedding-clothes.

"To come away like that!" she said, "without any luggage, without anything! It seems dreadful. When my old school-fellow Amy Morris, the doctor's daughter, married, she had three great trunksful of clothes. I saw the dresses—O, so many! and she was six months having things made. And then there was her wedding-dress—white silk. What am I to be married in, Hubert?"—her voice trembled a little as she pronounced his Christian name; it was almost the first time she had so addressed him—"What am I to be married in, Hubert, if I come away like that?" she asked shyly.

The question, so innocently spoken, stung him to the quick. It is a hard thing for a man to feel himself a scoundrel, and yet hold firmly to the purpose which he knows is infamous.

"My dear love," he said, after a scarcely perceptible pause—interval enough for a whisper from his better angel—"do you think I should love you any better for three boxes of clothes, or for the finest wedding-gown a French milliner could make you? Remember that story of patient Grisél I read you one day. It was in her utter lowliness and humility that fair young wife seemed sweetest to her stern husband. I will love you as her knight loved Enid, dear, in a faded silk. Burden yourself with nothing next Thursday morning. It will be my delight and pride to buy you all manner of prettinesses—from ivory-backed brushes for that beautiful hair, to glass slippers like Cinderella's, if you choose."

He spoke lightly, anxious to conceal feelings that were by no means of the lightest, and won a faint smile from Grace Redmayne, to whom his most trivial remark seemed the very essence of cleverness. She would come. All her doubts and fears and little difficulties resolved themselves into that one question, "What is there in the world I would not do for your sake?"

It was dusk by the time the business was settled. They had walked on to Kingsbury, where Grace gave her aunt's message to the family grocer, while Mr. Walgrave waited for her outside the shop. This being done, he walked back with her through the lanes and fields till they were very close to Brierwood, talking of the future all the time—that future which was to be a very bright one, according to Hubert Walgrave. In sight of the old farmhouse, where lights were gleaming from the lower windows, they parted.

"Only for a week, darling," he whispered, as he kissed the pale cold face.

She did not answer him; and he felt that she was shivering.

"My dearest girl, be brave," he said cheerily. "It is not such a hard road to happiness after all; and it shall be no fault of mine if your future life is not all happiness."

CHAPTER XVII.

BEYOND HIS REACH.

NOTHING happened to prevent Grace Redmayne's elopement, and having once given her promise, she had no thought of breaking it. Her fate was sealed from that moment in the lane when she said, "I will come." To break faith with *him* was a crime she could not contemplate. Yet throughout the intervening week she keenly felt any little kindness, any show of interest or motherly care, from sharp-tongued aunt Hannah, and was moved to tears more than once by her uncle's rough tenderness.

She was going from them almost for ever, she thought. It was hardly likely that Mr. Walgrave—who was a proud man, she fancied, despite his friendly ways at Brierwood—would allow his wife to associate much with her homely kinsfolk.

"He will not part me from my father," she said to herself. "That would be too cruel. But I don't suppose he will let me see my uncle and aunt very often."

She suffered bitterly during that brief interval—suffered sharp agonies of self-reproach, feeling herself the vilest of deceivers. If the time had been longer, she could hardly have borne up against all this mental misery, and held to her promise. Perhaps Mr. Walgrave had foreseen this when he made the time so short. She could neither eat nor sleep under this burden of secret care—spent her nights in watching for the morning, her days in a strange unsettled state; wandering about the farm in the chill November weather; creeping in and out of the rooms—touching familiar things absently—wondering when she should see them again. The piano which her father had given her—the dear old piano which she had been so proud of possessing as her very own—would her husband let her send for that by and by, when they were settled in their new home? Not the finest grand that Erard or Broadwood ever made could be so precious to her as this clumsy old cottage, by a nameless manufacturer.

Their marriage was to be secret, he had told her; but what did that mean? Secret so far as his world was concerned, she supposed; not secret from hers. He had given her permission to say what she pleased to her aunt in her farewell letter, except in that one matter of his name. And by and by, when their honeymoon was over, he would bring her to Brierwood to see

her aunt and uncle, perhaps. She brightened at the thought. How proud she would be to appear before them, leaning on his arm! how proud they must needs feel to see her married to a gentleman! and would it not be a pleasant surprise for her father, on his coming home, to find his darling had achieved such high fortune?

So in a sirange flutter of doubt and fear, lightened now and then by brief flashes of hopefulness, the days went by until the cheerless morning which was to see Grace Redmayne's farewell to Brierwood. On the previous night she made no attempt to rest—what rest had she had since that meeting in the lane?—nay, had she ever known pure and perfect repose after that fatal hour in which she first loved Hubert Walgrave? She had her small preparations to make, and trifling as these were, in her fluttered and nervous state of mind, they occupied a long time. She packed a carpet-bag with the things which seemed most essential for her to take. She had no elaborate travelling-bag bristling with silver-gilt lids and stoppers, like a small battery of guns, such as Miss Vallory considered indispensable for the briefest journey. Her chief treasures were a huge workbox and desk, inlaid with brass, which had belonged to her mother, and had been esteemed very costly and splendid articles in their time. These she left behind her with a sigh of regret. How many little girlish treasures—shreds of ribbon and morsels of lace, cornelian necklaces and silver bodkins—she had hoarded in the secret recesses of these receptacles! She fancied she would have made a more dignified entrance into her new life armed with that desk and workbox, nor had she the faintest suspicion that the brass-inlaid mahogany boxes were splendours of a by gone age.

There was her wedding-dress to prepare too, in the quiet hours of that long night, when the rushing and scuffling of mice behind the wainscot seemed awful in the deadly stillness of the house—the dress which, in her perfect innocence and trustfulness, she fondly hoped to wear, standing before God's altar, to be made Hubert Walgrave's wife. It must needs be the same dress in which she travelled, since he had forbidden her to cumber herself with luggage. She laid it out on her bed with dainty care—a turned and somewhat faded silk, which her father had bought her for a birthday present three years ago, and which had never been deposed from its proud position as her "best" dress—a garment to be worn upon half a dozen fine Sundays in the summer, and at about half a dozen small festive gatherings in the winter. It had been a bright peach colour—a *mauve*, Richard Redmayne had called it—when new, but had been toned down by midsummer sunshine and long laying up in lavender. She had sewn her choicest pieces of thread-lace—heirlooms, and vel-

low with age—on the neck and sleeves, and she had taken out a little white crape shawl of her mother's to wear over her shoulders. This, with her summer bonnet, trimmed with a new white ribbon, which she had bought by stealth, would not be so bad, she thought. A large shepherd's-plaid shawl would cover this festal attire during the journey, and a black veil would subdue the brightness of the new ribbon on her bonnet. She was pleased to think that she had planned everything so well.

She had her letter to write after this, and that labour was not an easy one. She knew nothing of where she was going, or at what church she was to be married; or whether it was to be on the day of her flight or the next day. After many ineffectual attempts, she wrote briefly:

"Dearest aunt Hannah,—Pray do not be angry, or let uncle James be angry with me. I am going away to be married to a gentleman. We are to be married in London; but as our marriage is to be kept quite secret for the present, I cannot tell you any more yet awhile—I dare not even tell you his name. I shall write to my father by the next mail, to beg his forgiveness for having taken this step without waiting for his consent. God bless you, dearest aunt, and all at Brierwood! Forgive me for my many faults and shortcomings in the past, and believe me to be ever and ever your grateful and affectionate niece,

"GRACE REDMAYNE."

She dressed herself by candle-light, a little while after the ancient eight-day clock on the stairs had struck five. O, what a sweet face that was which the old-fashioned looking-glass reflected! what a pale wild-rose-like beauty, and how little of earth there was in it! The next morning, at the same hour, there was to be a change upon the fair girlish face, and even less of earthliness.

It seemed a long walk from Brierwood to Kingsbury through the white fog of that November morning. A year ago and Grace Redmayne had seldom known what it was to flag or tire upon that familiar journey; but to-day, with a thick mist brooding over the landscape, it seemed to her as if she were going through a strange country. Once she stopped by a little gate, and put her hand to her head for a moment or two, trying to collect her thoughts, and to overcome the dream-like feeling which made everything appear unreal.

"Am I really going to meet him—really going to be married?" she said to herself, "or am I walking in my sleep?"

At last she came to the turnstile by the common, fully believing that the walk had taken her three hours, and fearing that her lover would have lost patience and gone away, leaving

her to return to Brierwood ignominiously, in the face of that farewell letter.

No, he was standing by the turnstile, and received her joyously, with outstretched arms and a bright smile.

"My sweetest, you are better than punctuality itself!" he exclaimed. "You are a quarter of an hour before the appointed time."

"What," she cried, bewildered, "isn't it very, very late?"

"No, Gracey, very early—a quarter to eight. I was here half an hour too soon."

"It seemed so long," she said, with a wondering look; "I thought I should be hours too late."

"You were nervous and excited, darling. You have brought your carpet-bag too, in spite of all I said, and much too heavy for those fragile arms to carry. Come, dear, you had better jump in at once. There's a nasty drizzling rain."

There was, and Grace had been walking through the rain for the last ten minutes without being aware of the fact. The fly from Tunbridge was waiting. Mr. Walgrave handed her in, wrapped her tenderly in a fleecy carriage rug that was the very essence of warmth, and they drove off briskly along the soft miry road to the railway station, where there were very few people waiting for the fast up train. It was not a bright morning for an elopement, the white mists had slowly melted away, leaving a gloomy landscape blurred with rain, under a low dim sky; but for Grace it was a journey through fairyland, the first-class railway carriage an enchanter's car rather than a common earthly conveyance. Was she not with him? And he was so kind and tender, so thoughtful, so anxious for her comfort.

Even though London-bridge terminus was a somewhat dirty and dispiriting place to arrive at, the girl's spirits did not falter. All fear, all doubt had vanished out of her mind, now she was with him. He was so good, so noble! Who could be base enough to doubt him!

It was only ten o'clock when they alighted at London-bridge. Hubert Walgrave put Grace into a cab, gave some brief directions to the cabman, and they drove off in a north-westerly direction.

"Are we going to drive straight to the church?" Grace asked, wondering whether she would be able to take off her veil and outer shawl, and arrange her bonnet in the vestry.

"No, dear; I am going to show you our house first, and to say a few serious words to you."

His face was turned a little towards the window as he spoke.

"Our house!" she cried, with childish delight; "are we really going to have a house?"

"Well, yes, dearest, we must live somewhere, you know. We are not like the birds of the air, and as I cannot leave London

at this time of year, I have set up our household gods in the suburbs. I think you will like the nest I have chosen, Gracey dear."

"How can I help liking it, if you do?"

"A true wife's answer!" he said, smiling at the bright spiritual face.

Her heart thrilled at the word.

"Your wife," she murmured softly. "How sweet the name sounds!"

"Yes, darling; it has been a sacred name ever since the days when Eve bore it—yet there was neither church nor law to give it to her. It is a word of deeper meaning than narrow-minded bigots think."

The speech might have alarmed another woman, in so dubious a position as Grace Redmayne's; but over her pure mind it passed like a summer breath across deep water, without leaving a ripple.

"You were never in town before, were you, Grace?" her lover asked lightly. It was not time yet for that serious talk he had spoken of just now.

"Once only; father brought me, and we went to see the Tower and St. Paul's."

He pointed out churches and buildings as they passed. They seemed to be a long time in the streets, and as they went through Gray's-inn-lane, by King's-cross, and the wild wastes beyond—which formed at that time an arid desert of newly-begun railway-arches, given over to desolation and bill-stickers—Grace hardly saw the metropolis in its most dignified aspect. She wondered a little that country people could be so delighted with London; but after passing the architectural splendours of Kentish-town, where the highest developement of the builder's art was manifest in corner public-houses, they began to ascend Highgate-rise, which Grace thought pretty, and something like the outskirts of Tunbridge.

They stopped at a cottage on the very top of the hill—a toy dwelling-place of the gothic order—with tiny mullioned windows below, and miniature oriels above; just the kind of house to delight a girl of nineteen, unawakened to the consideration of coal-cellar, wash-house, and dustbin, or to the question whether the architect had so placed his kitchen that the smell of the dinner must needs pervade the drawing-room. It was one of those bewitching habitations which look ravishing in a drawing, and concentrate in a small compass all possible inconveniences of domestic architecture.

Mr. Walgrave dismissed the cab, and took Grace and her carpet-bag across a few square yards of garden into a tiny hall, and then into a drawing-room—such a drawing-room. Grace

clasped her hands and looked round her with a cry of rapture.

Her lover had not been idle during his week of preparation. He had sent in nothouse flowers enough to fill a small conservatory, and to make the little room a positive bower. He had bought things with a man's reckless hand. One of the small sofas was loaded with silk-mercier's parcels, one of the side tables was heaped with perfumery, hairbrushes, fans, diamond-cut scent-bottles, little French shippers with big cherry-coloured bows, boxes of pale lavender gloves, everything piled up pell-mell, and the papers that had enveloped them thrown in a heap into a corner of the room.

"You see I have not forgotten you, Grace," he said, opening one of the silk-mercier's parcels, and showing her half a dozen dresses, such dresses as she could hardly have imagined out of a fairy tale. "Of course there are no end of things I did not know how to buy; but you can drive down to the West-end this afternoon and select those for yourself."

"How good you are to me!" the girl cried, standing by with clasped hands, while he unfolded the glistening silk dresses one after another, and flung them in billows of brightness at her feet—blue, rose, peach, maize, pearly gray, not a useful colour among them, chosen with a man's eye for mere prettiness in the abstract.

She stood like Margaret looking at her jewels in the cottage chamber, and with the tempter by her side.

"O, how lovely, how lovely! But, O, please stop, you are spoiling them," she cried, agonised by his clumsiness.

He trampled ruthlessly on the silks, and took her to his breast and kissed her.

"My dear one, it is you who are lovely!" he whispered; "do you think I shall admire you any more for these paltry auxiliaries? But it is worth all the silk dresses in Regent-street to see the light in your face as you look at them."

She disengaged herself from him gently.

"Hubert," she said, pointing to a clock on the mantelpiece, "isn't it time for us to go to church? I have heard my father say that people can't be married after twelve o'clock; but I suppose in London it's different."

"London means liberty, Grace. People who live in London hold themselves accountable for their actions to their own consciences, not to their next-door neighbour."

He glanced behind him to see that the door was shut, went over to it even to convince himself of the fact, and then came back to Grace with a sudden seriousness in his face and manner. He took both her hands, and looked down at her gravely and tenderly.

"Grace," he said, "I am going to put your affection to the crucial test. You pretend to be very fond of me, and I think you are; but after all you are little more than a schoolgirl, fifteen years my junior, and the love may be shallow—only a fancy perhaps at best."

"No, no, no!" she cried vehemently; "it was no fancy. I was breaking my heart when you came to me."

"Now, Grace, God knows I love you as dearly as ever man loved woman, and that I am ready to make any reasonable sacrifice for your sake; but——"

He paused, choked by a sudden huskiness, perhaps arrested also by something in the face looking up at him, which whitened to the lips.

"But what?" Grace Redmayne asked slowly.

"I cannot marry you. Your home shall be as bright a one as wife ever had, your lover as devoted as ever husband on this earth. Nothing but the empty form shall be wanting; and our union must needs be all the more sacred to me because it will be consecrated by a sacrifice on your part. I will love you all the days of my life, Grace, but I cannot marry you."

She looked at him fixedly, with wide-open eyes that seemed to him to grow unnaturally large, and then change to a lighter colour as she looked. Her white lips moved, as if she tried to echo his words, in sheer amazement; but no sound came from them save a little choking cry, with which she fell heavily to the ground.

Hubert Walgrave remembered the scene of the viper in Clevedon Chase. He knelt down and raised her gently, with her head upon his knee, calling loudly for help.

The domestic offices were not remote, and it is possible that the newly-hired servants were lurking a little nearer than their legitimate abiding place. A young woman rushed into the room, shrieked, glanced at the heap of tumbled silks, jumped at once to the conclusion that her master and mistress had been quarrelling, and then began the usual formula in fainting cases.

Without any effect, however. Grace Redmayne lay like a statue, white and cold, with her head upon her lover's knee.

"She is in the habit of fainting in this way," Mr. Walgrave said nervously; "it's constitutional. But I think you'd better send for the nearest doctor. Quick, quick!—good God, woman, what are you staring at!"

The housemaid fled to the cook, whom she dispatched in quest of a surgeon. Mr. Walgrave lifted the statue-like form with an effort, and placed it gently on the sofa. He knelt down and laid his hand above the heart. Great heavens, what an awful stillness! He bent his ear down to the girl's breast and listened, but could hear no sound; and in a sudden terror rushed

to the bell, rang violently, and then came back, to fling more water over the pallid face.

It was something worse than pallid. What was that cold bluish shade which crept over it as he looked?

He had not long to wait the answer to that question. The local surgeon came in, pushed him aside uncereimoniously, and stooped down to examine the patient.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, after the briefest scrutiny, "a case of heart-disease. She is dead!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. WALGRAVE IS TRANSLATED.

ALL through the long dead hours of the night, and after the cheerless winter morning had crept in through the close-drawn venetians, Hubert Walgrave sat alone in the dainty little drawing-room, littered with the things he had bought for Grace Redmayne, gay with hothouse flowers that languished in the close atmosphere, fairy roses and waxen camellias which her hands were to have tended.

She lay upstairs, in the pretty white-drapiered bedchamber that was to have been her own—lay with her hands folded on her breast, more lovely than he could have supposed it possible for death to be. The two servant-maids, and a weird old woman who came he knew not whence, had summoned him to see her, when their dismal office had been done; and he had stood alone by the white bed, looking down at her, tearless—with a countenance that seemed more rigid than her own.

He stayed there for a long time—knelt down and tried to fashion a prayer, but could not; he had not command enough over himself to shape thoughts or words into any given form. There was a confusion in his mind which in all his life had never before oppressed him. Once he bent over the cold hands, and covered them with passionate kisses.

"My angel, my dove, come back to me!" he cried; "I will not believe that you are dead."

But that awful coldness, that utter stillness, gave him an agony that was more than he could endure. He turned away, and went back to the room below, where he sat alone till morning, with scarcely a change of posture, thinking of what he had done.

To say that if he could have brought her back to life he would have married her, would have flung every hope of worldly advancement, every consideration for the prejudices of mankind to the winds, is to say very little. Looking back now at his conduct,

in the light of this calamity, he wondered how he could ever have counted the cost of any sacrifice that he might be called on to make for Grace Redmayne.

"I loved her with all my heart and soul," he said to himself, "as I never loved before, as I never can hope to love again. What more had I to consider? The loss of a fortune—a wife's fortune? What! am I such a sordid wretch as to hold that worth the cost of a wrong done to her? But, O God, how could I think that I should kill her? I meant to be so true and loyal to her. I meant to make her life so bright."

He looked round at the scattered silken stuffs, lying in a heap on the floor as he had kicked them aside when Grace fell—the flowers and glove-boxes, and fans and scent-bottles; looked at them with a bitter laugh.

"I have been taught that women only care for these things," he said to himself; "and yet a few heartless words of mine killed her."

He thought of all his plans, which had seemed to him so reasonable, so generous even, in regard to Grace; this dainty suburban home, an orderly little establishment—no stint of anything that makes life pleasant—a carriage perhaps, for his darling. His professional income was increasing daily, he saw himself on the high road to distinction, and could afford to regulate his life upon a liberal scale.

And for his marriage with Augusta Vallory? That was not to be given up—only deferred for an indefinite period; and when it did take place, it would be like some royal marriages on record, a ceremonial political alliance, which would leave his heart free for Grace.

But she was gone, and he felt himself something worse than a murderer.

There was an inquest next day, an unspeakable horror to Hubert Walgrave; but he had grown strangely calm by this time, and regulated his conduct with extreme prudence.

He had taken the house and engaged the servants under the name of Walsh. Before the coroner he stated that the young lady who had died yesterday was his sister Grace Walsh. The housemaid had heard him call her Grace while they were both trying to restore her, so any concealment of the Christian name would have been impossible. He had been down in to the country to fetch her from a boarding-school, whence she was coming to keep house for him. She was his only sister, aged nineteen.

The case was a very simple one. There had been a post-mortem examination, and the cause of death was sufficiently obvious.

"There was organic disease," the doctor said, and then went

on to give his technical explanation of the case. "It was the excitement of coming home to her brother, no doubt, that precipitated matters. But she could hardly have lived many years—a sudden shock might at any time have killed her."

"There could have been no sudden shock in this case, though," remarked the coroner; "there could be nothing of a sudden or startling character in a prearranged meeting between brother and sister!"

"Probably not," replied the medical man; "but extreme excitement, a feverish expectation of some event long hoped for, emancipation from school-life, and so on, might have the same fatal effect. The nature was evidently extremely sensitive. There are physiological signs of that."

"Was your sister much excited yesterday, Mr. Walsh?" asked the coroner.

"Yes; she was considerably excited—she had a peculiarly sensitive nature."

The housemaid was examined, and confirmed her master's story. They had both supposed the young lady had only fainted. Mr. Walsh said she was subject to fainting-fits.

The coroner was quite satisfied; everything was done with extreme consideration for the feelings of Mr. Walsh, who was evidently a gentleman. Verdict: "Heart-disease, or fatal syncope."

In less than a week from the day of her flight, Grace Redmayne was laid quietly to rest in the churchyard of Hetheridge, Herts—a village as picturesque and sequestered as any rural nook in the green heart of the midland shires.

Mr. Walgrave had a horror of cemeteries, and the manner in which the solemn business of interment is performed in those metropolises of the dead. He chose the most rustic spot that he could find within a reasonable distance of Highgate, the spot that seemed to him most in consonance with the character of his beloved dead.

And so ended his love-story. Afar off there hung a dark impending cloud—trouble which might arise for him in the future out of this tragedy. But he told himself that, if Fortune favoured him, he might escape all that. The one great fact was his loss, and that seemed to him very heavy.

The business of life had to go on nevertheless, the great Cardium case came on, and Hubert Walgrave reaped the reward of a good deal of solid labour, spoke magnificently, and made a considerable advance in his professional career by the time the trial was over. In the beginning of December the Acropolis-square house emerged from its state of hibernation, and began to give dinners—dinners to which Mr. Walgrave was in duty bound to go.

When he called upon Miss Vallory after one of these banquets, she expressed surprise at seeing a band on his hat.

"I did not know you were in mourning," she said. "You did not tell me that you had lost any one."

"It was hardly worth while to trouble you about it since the person was a stranger to you, and not a near relation of mine."

"Not a near relation! but your hatband is as deep as a widower's—as deep as that of a widower who means to marry again almost immediately, for they always wear the deepest."

"Is it?" asked Mr. Walgrave with a faint smile; "I told the hatter to put on a band. I gave no directions as to width."

"But tell me all about your relation, Hubert. You must know that I am interested in everything that concerns you. Was it an uncle, or an aunt?"

"Neither; only a distant cousin."

"But really now, Hubert, that hatband is absurd for a distant cousin. You positively must have it altered."

"I will take it off altogether, if you like, my dear. After all, these 'customary suits of solemn black' are only 'the trappings and the suits of woe.' But I have a feeling that there is a kind of disrespect in not wearing mourning for a person you have esteemed."

"Pray don't suppose that I disapprove of mourning. I consider any neglect of those things the worst possible taste. But a distant cousin, hardly a relation at all—the mourning should be appropriate. Did your cousin die in London?"

"No; in the country." He saw that Miss Vallory was going to ask him where, and anticipated her. "In Shropshire."

He said this at a venture, having a vague idea that no one knew Shropshire.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Augusta; "we have been asked to visit friends near Bridgenorth: but I have never been in Shropshire. Did your cousin leave you any money? Perhaps that is the reason of your deep hatband."

"My cousin left me nothing—but—but a closer acquaintance with death. Every loss in a family brings us that, you know."

"Of course,—it is always very sad."

The Cardimum case being a marked and positive triumph for Hubert Walgrave, he assumed his silk gown early in the ensuing spring, very much to the gratification of his betrothed, who was really proud of him, and anxious for his advancement. Was he not indeed a part of herself? No position that her own money could obtain for her would satisfy her without the aid of some distinction achieved by him. She knew to the uttermost what money could and could not purchase.

There was a family dinner in Acropolis-square very soon after

Mr. Walgrave's advancement, a dinner so strictly private that even Weston had not been invited.

"The fact is, I want half an hour's quiet chat with you, Walgrave," Mr Vallory said, when Augusta had left the two gentlemen alone after dinner; "so I took especial care there should be no one here to-day but ourselves. I don't like to ask you to come and see me at the office: that seems so confoundedly formal."

"At any place, and at any time, I should be happy to hold myself at your disposal," Mr. Walgrave replied politely.

"Thanks; I know you are very good, and all that kind of thing; but I wanted a friendly talk, you see: and I never can have half an hour in the Old Jewry free from junior partners or senior clerks bobbing in and out, wanting my signature to this, that, and the other, or to know whether I will see Mr. Smith, or won't see Mr. Jones. The truth of the matter is, my dear Walgrave, that I am very much pleased with you. I may say more than pleased—surprised. Not that I ever for a moment doubted your talents; no, believe me,"—this with a ponderous patronage, as if he feared that the younger man might perish untimely under the fear of not having been appreciated by him—"no, no, my dear fellow, I was quite aware there was stuff in you, but did not know how soon—ha, ha!—you might turn your stuff into silk. I did not expect your talents to bear fruit so rapidly."

"You are very kind," said Hubert Walgrave, looking steadily down at his plate. He had an apprehension of what was coming, and nerved himself to meet it. It was his fate; the destiny he had once courted eagerly, set all his wits to compass. Why should he shrink from it now? What was there to come between him and Augusta Vallory? Nothing—but a ghost!

"Now I am not a believer in long engagements," continued Mr. Vallory: "I am a man of the world, and I look at things from a worldly point of view, and I can't say that I have ever seen any good come of them. Sometimes the man sees some one he likes better than the girl he's engaged to, sometimes the girl sees some one she likes better; neither is candid enough to make a clean breast of it; and they go dawdling on, pretending to be devoted to each other, and ultimately marry without a ha'porth of love between them."

"There is sound philosophy in what you say, no doubt; but I should imagine where the affection is sincere, and not weakened by separation, time should strengthen the bond."

"Yes, when a man and woman are married, and know that the bondage is a permanent business. Now when you first proposed to my daughter, with a full knowledge of her position as a young woman who might fairly expect to make a much better match, I told you that I could not consent to your marriage

until you had achieved some standing in your profession—income was a secondary consideration with me. Augusta has enough for both."

"I hope I made you understand clearly that I could never submit to a position of dependence on my wife?" Mr. Walgrave said hastily.

"Quite so; but you can't help absorbing the advantages of your wife's money. Your wife can't eat turtle-soup at her end of the table, while you eat mutton-broth at your end. Augusta is not a girl who will cut her coat according to your cloth. She will expect the surroundings she has been accustomed to from her cradle; and she will expect you to share them, without question as to whose banking account contributes the most to the expenses of the household. What she has a right to expect from her husband is personal distinction; and as I believe you are on the high road to achieve that, I give my full permission to as early a marriage as may be agreeable to you both."

Mr. Walgrave bowed, in acknowledgment of this concession, without any outward semblance of rapture; but as they were both Englishmen, Mr. Vallory expected no such demonstration.

"You are very generous, my dear sir," said the younger man quietly; "I am Augusta's slave in this matter; her will is mine."

"So be it. I leave you to settle the business between you. But there is one point that I may as well explain at once—my late partner Harcross's will is rather a remarkable one, and provides for the event of Augusta's marriage. He was a peculiar man in many ways, my old friend Harcross, and had a monstrous reverence for his own name; not that he ever pretended that any Harcrosses came over with the Conqueror, or when the Conqueror came were all at home, or anything of that kind. His grandfather was a self-made man, and the Harcrosses were a sturdy, self-reliant race, with an extraordinary opinion of their own merits."

Mr. Walgrave raised his eyebrows a little, wondering whither all this rambling talk was drifting.

"And to come to the point at once," continued Mr. Vallory, "my good friend left it as a condition of his bequest, that whoever Augusta married, her husband should assume the name of Harcross. Now the question is, shall you have any objection to that change of name?"

Hubert Walgrave shrugged his shoulders, and raised his eyebrows just a shade higher.

"Upon my word I don't see why I should object," he said. "The proposition seems a little startling at first, as if one were asked to dye one's hair, or something of that kind. But I suppose any shred of reputation I may have made as Walgrave will stick to me as Harcross."

"Decidedly, my dear boy; we will take care of that," Mr Vallory answered. "There is no name better known and respected in the legal profession than the name of Harcross. As Hubert Walgrave you may be a very clever fellow; but as Hubert Harcross you will be associated with one of the oldest firms in the *Law List*. You will be no loser professionally by the change, I can assure you."

"Then I am ready to take out letters patent whenever you and Augusta desire me to do so. 'Hubert Walgrave Harcross,' not a bad signature to put at the foot of a letter to the free and independent electors of Eatanswill, when I go in for a seat in Parliament by and by. Hubert Harcross—so be it! What's in a name, and in my name of all others, that I should cherish it?"

CHAPTER XIX.

RICHARD REDMAYNE'S RETURN.

A GREAT ship far out at sea, an English ship homeward bound, from Melbourne to the port of Liverpool, and among the passengers on board her one Richard Redmayne, agriculturist, gold-digger, and general speculator, sailing back to the home of his forefathers.

He is returning to England sooner than he had hoped to return by at least a year. Things have gone well with him during the last eighteen months; almost as well as he had fancied they might go in his daydreams under the old cedar at Brierwood, in those summer-afternoon reveries in which he had watched his daughter's face athwart the smoke of his pipe, and thought what a grand thing it would be to go out to Australia and make a fortune for her.

He has done it. For a long time the Fates seemed against him; it was dreary work living the hard rough life, toiling from misty morning to mistier evening, facing all weathers, holding his own against all competitors, and with no result. Many a time he had wished himself back in England—ay, even with Brierwood sold to strangers, and only a field and a cottage left him—but a field and a cottage in England, with English flowers peeping in at his casement, English fare, English climate, and his daughter's sweet face to make the brightness of his life. What did it all matter? he asked himself sometimes. Did a big house and many acres constitute happiness? Had his broad fields or goodly rick-yards consoled him in the early days of his widowhood, when the loss of his fair young wife made all the universe seem dark to him? A thousand times, no. Then

welcome poverty in Kent, among the orchards and hop-gardens with the daughter of his love.

He had been sick to the heart when the tide turned. His first successes were not large; but they cheered him beyond measure, and enabled him to write hopefully home. Then he fell into companionship with a clever adventurer, a man who had a smattering of science, and a good deal of rough genius, in his peculiar way; a man who was great upon the chemistry of soils, but lacked a strong arm, and herculean muscles, like Rick Redmayne's; whereby there arose a partnership between the two, in which the farmer was to profit by the knowledge of Mr. Nicholas Spettigue, the amateur chemist, while Mr. Spettigue on his part was to reap a fair share of the fruits of Rick Redmayne's labour. The business needed four men to work it well; so they took a brace of sturdy Milesians into their company, whose labours were to be recompensed by an equitable share in the gains; and with these coadjutors began business in real earnest.

Nicholas Spettigue had got scent of a virgin gulley, beyond Wood's Point, a little way off the beaten track, and reputed worth working. The four men went in quest of this El Dorado alone, and camped out together for a spell of many months, toiling manfully, remote from the general herd of diggers; standing knee-deep in running water for hours on end, rocking the cradle with a patience that surpassed the patience of maternity; living on one unvarying fare of grilled mutton and damper, with unlimited supplies of strong black tea, boiled in a "billy," and unsoftened by the produce of the cow.

They slept in a cavern under one of the sterile hills that sheltered their Pactolus, and slept none the less sweetly for the roughness of their quarters. Not very long did they hold the secret of their discovery: other explorers tracked them to their land of promise, and set up their claims in the neighbourhood; but Mr. Spettigue had spotted the best bit in the district, and Fortune favoured him and his Kentish partner. They were not quite so lucky as a certain Dr. Kerr, who, in the early days of the gold discoveries at Bathurst, found a hundredweight of gold one fine morning on his sheep-walk, lying under his very nose as it were, where it had lain throughout his proprietorship of the land, and might have so lain for ever, had not an aboriginal shepherd's eye been caught by the glitter of a yellow streak amidst the quartz. They did not fall upon monster nuggets, but by patience and toil realized a profit varying from ten pounds a week per man to forty.

When they had exhausted, or supposed they had exhausted, their field of operations, they divided the spoil. Richard Redmayne's share came to something more than three thousand pounds. All he owed in England could be paid with half the

amount. He had seen a good deal of the country since he had been out—had seen something of its agricultural capabilities, and wanted to see more; so now that the chief business of his exile was accomplished, he gave himself a brief holiday in which to explore the wild sheep-walks of this new world. He was not a man who loved money for its own sake; and having now more than enough to pay his debts, and set him going again in the dear old Kentish homestead, he had no desire to toil any longer; much to the surprise and vexation of Nicholas Spettigue, who had his eye upon a new district, and was eager to test its capabilities.

"I shall have to look out for a new pal," he said. "But I doubt if I shall ever find an honest man with such a biceps as yours, Rick. If you'd only keep on with me, I'd make you a millionaire before we shut up shop. But I suppose you're homesick, and there's no use in saying any more."

"I've got a daughter, you see," Richard Redmayne said, looking down with a thoughtful smile, "and I want to get back to her."

"As if I didn't know all about your daughter," exclaimed Mr. Spettigue, who had heard of Grace Redmayne very often from the fond father's lips. "Why don't you write to her to come out to the colony? You might settle her somewhere comfortably, and go on with your work up here, till you were as rich as one of the Rothschilds."

Richard Redmayne shook his head by way of answer to this proposition.

"A colonial life wouldn't suit Gracey," he said; "she's too tender a flower for that sort of thing."

"I daresay she's an uncommonly pretty girl," Mr. Spettigue remarked in his careless way, "if she's anything like you, mate."

"Like me!" cried the farmer; "she's as much like me as a lily's like me—she's as much like me as a snowdrop is like a sunflower. If you can fancy a water-lily that's been changed into a woman, you can fancy my daughter Grace."

"I can't," answered the practical Mr. Spettigue. "I never was good at fancying, and if I could, your water-lily-faced woman is not my style. I like a girl with cheeks as red as peonies, and plenty of flesh on her bones, with no offence meant to you, Rick."

So the partnership was dissolved, and Richard Redmayne bought himself a horse, and set off upon an exploring expedition among the sheep-farms.

In the course of these wanderings, in which he met with much hospitality and kindness in solitary homesteads, where his bright face and cheery voice won a joyous welcome, Mr. Redmayne came upon a lowland farm in Gypps Land, whose owners had fallen on evil days; the rough loghouse was empty, the land neglected.

and a family of vagabond wanderers who had taken up their abode in one of the barns told him that the estate was to be sold by auction at Melbourne, in something less than a fortnight.

He went over the land, and his practised eye was quick to perceive its value. It had been badly worked, and the man who owned it had gone at a rapid pace to the dogs; but the occupants of the barn told Mr. Redmayne that this late proprietor had drunk himself into delirium tremens three or four times a year, and had squandered every sixpence he earned playing "poker" and other equally intellectual games with any wandering stranger whom Providence sent in his way. The farm had fallen into bad odour by reason of his non-success, and had been put up to auction already, and withdrawn from sale, the biddings not reaching the reserved price which the late owner's trade assignees had put upon it.

"You might get it by private contract, I dessay," said the man, when he perceived Mr. Redmayne's inclination to buy, "if you was to look sharp about it, and make yer hoffer to the hauctioneer between this and nex' Toosday week."

Richard Redmayne was fascinated by the place, which was called Bulrush Meads, there being a considerable tract of low-lying meadow land, with a broad stream meandering through it, richly fringed with tall bulrushes—superb land for stock. There was hill as well as dale, and the site of the rough log dwelling-house was as picturesque as anything he had seen in his holiday ramble. What a king he might be here with Grace! he thought to himself. The life would not be rough for her, safe sheltered under his wing, and with honest Kentish lasses for her servants. His quick eye told him how the place might be improved: a roomy parlour built out on one side, with a wide verandah supported by rustic pillars, a pleasant shelter beneath which his darling might sit and work on sunny afternoons. And what a prospect for those gentle eyes to gaze upon! what a varied sweep of hill and valley, bright silver streamlet flashing athwart greenest of meadows, a thousand sheep looking no bigger than so many daisies upon the distant uplands, a blue lake that was vast as an inland sea in the foreground, and far away on the left of the landscape a forest of almost tropical richness! A couple of bedrooms could be added above, wooden like the rest of the house, which was strongly though roughly built. Vines and pumpkins climbed to the shingle roof, and all kinds of flowers, brighter and larger than the blossoms of his native land, overran the neglected garden.

On one side of the low rambling edifice there was an orchard of peach-trees; on the other a grove of cabbage-palms, eighty feet high, their tall trunks entwined by a luxuriant flowering parasite; a giant fig-tree spread its broad leaves near at hand,

side by side with a huge stinging-nettle tree, all a-glitter with silvery spiculæ, like a vegetable needle manufactory.

The fancy once having seized upon him was not to be put away. He was very fond of Brierwood—fond with a traditional love which was an instinct of his mind; but he had always been more or less cramped in that narrow orbit. This rough-and-ready life, with such wide space for roaming and adventure, suited him a great deal better than the dot-and-go-one round of a farmer's existence at home. And then the novelty of the thing had a powerful witchery. To take this neglected estate in hand, and make it a model of high farming, was a task worth an enterprising man's labour. At Brierwood everything was so narrow, his best experiments had failed for want of room. Here, in this wide field, he saw his way to certain fortune.

Fevered by visions of a veritable Arcadia, of which his beloved Grace should be queen; fired too by the squatter, who hung about him as he explored the place, and was eager to curry favour with a probable purchaser, cherishing his own peculiar vision of a comfortable berth under the new rule,—Mr. Redmayne ultimately resolved to make a bid for Bulrush Meads, and mounted his horse to ride to Melbourne.

He turned his back upon the fertile plains of Central Gypps Land, aptly termed the garden of Victoria, and entered the narrow bush-track cut through that broad belt of forest with its undergrowth of dense jungle, and fern-tree gullies, which surrounds the plains of Gypps Land. He thought not of the hardy M'Millan, who first explored the rich country he had left behind, from the New South Wales side; nor of the indomitable Streletzski, who first mapped-out its water-shed and penetrated the inmost recesses of its dark forests; nor of the surveyor who cut and cleared the track over which he was then riding, and must continue riding for another forty miles before he could reach the open country on the other side. Hardly did he pause to admire the picturesque scenery in the fern-tree gullies, the subjects of many a glorious painting by Gerrard and Chevalier, now household words among the art-lovers in the colony. Up hill and down dale he plodded, obliged to follow in the deep tracks of the bullocks, which, on their way to the Melbourne market in wet weather, had converted the cleared space between the dense jungle into a sort of new-moulded potato-field, tilted at angles to suit the varied steepness of the hills, that rose range on range before the traveller in an endless perspective.

Obliged to camp when darkness overtook him, Richard Redmayne short-hobbled his horse in one of the valleys where some slight promise of food for the jaded animal met his eye. Here he selected some monarch of the forest whose butt had been hollowed out by a bush fire, broke off an armful of branches

from the nearest fern-tree for his bed, ate his lonely supper rolled himself in his blanket, and was soon deep asleep under the southern stars, dreaming of Brierwood and Grace.

With daybreak he resumed his journey, and in a few hours reached the open country, where the cheery sight of human habitations gladdened his eyes, and the good road to Melbourne was under his horse's feet, which town he reached upon the fourth day after his departure from Bulrush Meads, and in time to attend the sale. He made no attempt at negotiation, thinking it wiser to await the hazard of the auction. Circumstances favoured him; the biddings were feeble and spiritless; and Mr. Redmayne bought Bulrush Meads for eight hundred and fifty pounds—just one hundred above the reserved price. The auctioneer congratulated him upon having got the estate for an old song, and drank a bottle of champagne at the lucky purchaser's expense.

"And, upon my word, it ought to be a three-dozen case," he said, "considering your luck, Mr. Redmayne."

All legal rites being duly performed, Richard Redmayne went back to take possession of his estate, thoroughly delighted with his investment. He left his vagabond friend as a kind of caretaker, giving him a ten-pound note as an advance payment for work to be done in the way of repairing fences and improving boundaries.

"If I find you know anything about farming, I shall take you on as a regular hand when I come back," he said; "and I shall come back as soon as ever I can settle my affairs in England."

He meant to let Brierwood, or to leave his brother James in possession, if things had gone as prosperously as James asserted they had gone in his absence, and thus work the two estates. For himself, it seemed to him that no state of existence could be so delicious as a wild free life at Bulrush Meads, with a prosperous farmyard and a goodly array of corn ricks, a comfortable hearth by which the wandering stranger might rest, a hospitable table at which there should always be room enough for the traveller, and half-a-dozen good saddle-horses in his stable. He would teach Grace to ride, and she could canter about the farm with him, ride beside him many a mile on moonlight nights across that splendid country, over grassy hill-tops two thousand feet above the southern sea.

The fact that the life might be somewhat lonely for his daughter flashed across his mind occasionally; but he dismissed the notion carelessly enough. What mode of existence could be duller than her life at Brierwood? In Kent she was only a small farmer's daughter. Here in these backwoods she would be a queen; and he had confidence enough in her affection to

believe that any life would be acceptable to her that was to be shared with him.

Of the day when she might desire to form new ties he thought but vaguely. No doubt that time would come: some handsome young emigrant would woo and win her; but even that event need not result in separation between father and daughter. There was room enough at Bulrush Meads for a patriarchal household; and Richard Redmayne could fancy himself sitting under his vine-clad verandah, cool and spacious as a Sevillian *patio*, with a noisy crowd of grandchildren clambering on his knees.

"I will never part with her," he said to himself fondly.

He sailed from Melbourne early in March, and arrived at Liverpool towards the end of May. He had received no letters from home for some months before his departure; but this was the result of his own nomadic habits rather than of any neglect on the part of his correspondents. The last bore the date of October and told him that all was well. He was not a man to be tormented by morbid apprehension of possible evil. He made his homeward journey in high spirits, full of hopes and schemes for the future. He had a rude map of Bulrush Meads, which he used to spread out before him on the cuddy-table and ponder upon for an hour at a stretch, with a pencil in his hand, marking out so many acres for wheat here, so many for barley there, inferior tracts for mangel-wurzel, patches of turnips, odd bits of outlying land that would grow beans, wide level pastures for his cattle; dotting down hedges and boundaries, putting in every five-barred gate which was to impart to that fertile wilderness the trim aspect of an English farm.

And so it came to the end of May, bright joyous weather, the first flush and bloom of summer, and Richard Redmayne, with a heart as light as a feather, trod firmly on the soil of his native land.

He lost no time. Up to London as fast as an express train could carry him, from one railway-station to another in a rapid hansom, at London Bridge Terminus just in time to catch the train for Tunbridge, from Tunbridge homewards in a fly. He could scarcely sit quietly in the vehicle, as the familiar hedgerows went by him, so eager was he to arrive at the end of his journey. "I could walk faster than this," he said to himself; and this impatience so grew upon him at last, that he called to the driver to stop, got out hurriedly, and paid and dismissed him within a mile of Brierwood.

He felt freer when he stood alone amidst the still evening landscape. It was sunset—a sunset in early summer after a cloudless day. The western sky was like a sea of gold, and over all the heaven there was a pale tinge of rose colour. There were woods near at hand, and even in his feverish haste Richard Red-

mayne stopped for a minute or so to listen to the song of a nightingale—a new sound to him after those musicless forests yonder, with only the sharp ringing note of the bellbird, or the mocking tones of the laughing jackass. There was not a shorn elm in the hedgerow that he did not recognise. How familiar, how sweet the scene was! If he had come across that waste of waters only for this, his voyage would hardly have seemed profitless. The landscape moved him as if it had been a living soul—a human creature he had fondly loved.

But it was not for this he had returned; it was for Grace's sake, and for hers only. On every other account it would have suited him better to remain yonder, and set his new estate going. His home-sickness had been only a yearning to see that one beloved face, to feel the gentle touch of that one dear hand.

A quarter of an hour's rapid walking brought him in front of the old house. There it stood, stout and substantial as when he left it, a goodly homestead, untouched by wind or weather, with the sturdy air of hale old age. The garden was all abloom with flowers; there were flower-pots on the window-sills—bow-pots, his mother had called them—and the upper casements stood open. He looked up at the windows of his daughter's room, half hoping to catch a glimpse of her bright head above the geraniums and mignonette; but he could see nothing. Everything about the house looked orderly and prosperous; he heard the geese screaming and the turkeys gobbling in the farmyard, and that deep lowing of cows which has always something awful in it. All things were very fair in the golden evening light. If there were trouble in store for him, the outward aspect of his home gave him no hint of that trouble.

At the last moment, with his hand upon the bell, he changed his mind. He had given them no notice of his return by letter. He would go round to the back, slip in quietly through the garden, and take them all by surprise.

And Grace? He could fancy her shriek of joy, her wild rush into his outspread arms. The picture was in his mind as he went round by a narrow strip of orchard into the garden behind the house. It had never entered into his thoughts that there could be anything amiss.

All was very still; the day's work was over; it was the one delicious hour of breathing-time before supper—the hour in which even aunt Hannah's tongue was wont to be at rest, while she sat with folded hands and slumbered—an hour in which the tunes of uncle James's pipe ascended like incense burnt before the shrine of the goddess Hestia.

The parlour window was wide open; he went up to it softly over the close-cut grass, and looked in. Yes, his brother and sister-in-law sat in the very attitudes he had fancied: James

Redmayne, smoking with a solemn face, his legs stretched on a chair, and a huge silk handkerchief spread over his knees. He looked older and a shade more careworn, the wanderer thought. Aunt Hannah slept in her stiff-backed wooden arm-chair by the empty hearth, and on her face too there were signs of care.

"If I hadn't seen the grass as I came along, I should have thought from Jim's face there was a bad look-out for the hay," Richard Redmayne said to himself.

But where was Grace?

In her own room, perhaps, making some bit of finery for her next Sunday's adornment, or reading a novel in the best parlour, or in the garden. He glanced behind him, but could see no light dress flitting by the distant flower-borders, or between the gray old trunks of the apple-trees.

It chilled him a little. The delay would be but a few moments, doubtless. She was somewhere near at hand, and would fly to him like a mad thing at the sound of his voice; but he had so languished to see her, that the briefest delay was a kind of disappointment.

"Jim," he said gently, not wishing to awaken aunt Hannah too suddenly from her slumbers.

James Redmayne let his long churchwarden pipe slip through his fingers.

"My God!" he cried, "is it a ghost?"

"A very substantial one, old fellow—thirteen stone in the saddle. It's your affectionate brother Richard in the flesh, and sharp-set enough to enjoy an honest English supper presently."

He stepped lightly across the low window-seat into the room.

"Where's Gracey?"

Dusk as it was, he saw the white change on his brother's face, the awful look which Hannah Redmayne turned upon him as she opened her eyes and beheld him standing there.

"Where's my daughter?" he cried, sharply.

The dead silence that followed turned his heart to stone. Those two scared faces, the white dumb lips of his brother, and the silence were enough.

"Is she dead?" he asked, in a low, hoarse voice; "is she dead? Speak out, can't you, and have done with it!"

Aunt Hannah was the first to find courage to speak.

"She is not dead, Richard—at least we have no cause to think so. She may be well and happy, for anything we know. But, O, dear, dear, dear! didn't you get James's letter, telling you everything, with a copy of the letter she wrote to me when she went away?"

"When she went away!" repeated the father, sternly; "when she went away! I thought I left her in your care, Hannah Redmayne?"

"And God knows I took care of her, Richard. But could I help it, if she had the heart to deceive me—to steal away one dark morning, without leaving a trace of where she was gone? But you must have got the letter, surely?"

"I got no letter, after the one about the hopping. I was out of the way of letters; and I thought my daughter was safe with you. Do you think I would have left her, woman, if I hadn't thought that?"

He dropped heavily into a chair, and sat looking at them with an awful face. He who had been all life and eagerness five minutes ago seemed changed into a man of stone.

"What has become of my child?" he said, in the same stern accusing tone. "Begin at the beginning. She is not dead; but she is gone. When did she go, and how?"

"On the 11th of last November, secretly, stealing away one morning at seven o'clock, when we were all busy. But her letter will tell you the most. We know so little."

Mrs. James went to a side-table, where there was a huge mahogany desk, which she unlocked, and from which she took Grace's poor little letter. It had been read and re-read many times. The folds of the paper were almost worn through. Richard Redmayne read it aloud twice over, rapidly the first time, then very slowly.

"Well!" he exclaimed, "a runaway marriage; there's not so much harm in that. 'I shall write to my father by the next mail to beg his forgiveness.' I missed her letter, poor child, along with my other letters. But why should the marriage be secret? and who the devil did she run away with?"

"There was only one person ever suspected—a Mr. Walgry. She says in her letter that she was going to marry a gentleman, and he is the only gentleman she knew."

"How did she come to know him?"

"He came here to lodge last summer. Mr. Wort recommended him?"

"Came here to lodge!" roared Richard Redmayne. "Who gave you leave to turn Brierwood into a lodging-house?"

"It was to oblige Mr. Wort, and to make a twenty-pound note to help you on, Richard. He was a perfect gentleman."

"—— you!" cried the farmer, with a tremendous oath. "A perfect gentleman; and he stole my daughter! A perfect gentleman; and he has ruined my daughter!"

Mrs. James pointed to the letter.

"She was going away to be married," she faltered.

"Going away to be married! As if every one didn't know that old story! Is there anything easier than for a villain to promise that? And my darling, that was little more than a child, and knew no more than a child! Keep out of my way,

woman!" cried Rick Redmayne, rising suddenly, with his hands and arms twitching convulsively. "Keep out of my way, for I feel as if I could murder you!"

Hannah went down on her knees before him. She was not a woman to be easily moved, but she had a heart.

"If I had act or part in this trouble, Rick," she said piteously, "may God and you forgive me. He knows I tried to do my duty, and that I loved the poor child truly. As I have a soul to be saved, I did everything for the best. I trusted Grace."

"Yes, and brought a stranger into her home, and trusted him."

"I had John Wort's word for his character."

"And to please John Wort you made Brierwood a lodging-house, and brought about my daughter's ruin."

"Why should you look at it on the darkest side, Richard?" asked Mrs. James, who for her own part had never since Grace's flight taken any view except the darkest of the subject. But to console this grief-stricken man she was ready to affect a hopefulness she had never felt.

"Has she written to you since she went away?"

"No."

"If she had been honourably married, and happy, do you think she would have been silent?"

There was no answer to that question.

"Was she so ungrateful, so wanting in affection, that she could turn her back upon her home, leave her own flesh and blood to think her false and heartless, to blush for her perhaps, and never write a line to tell them whether she was dead or alive?"

"She may have written to you, Richard."

"She may. O, my God, what a fool I was to be so careless about getting my letters! I never thought of trouble. I was coming home to my daughter, coming home to find—this!"

He looked round the room, with utter despair in his eyes, with the look which a man might give who stood among the ashes of his home. What would the burning of Brierwood, or the loss of every sixpence whereof he stood possessed, have been to him, compared with the loss of his child?

"And it was for this I worked," he muttered, passing his arm across his forehead with a half-bewildered air; "it was for this fortune favoured me!" Then, after a pause, he said suddenly, "You did something, I suppose; you took some means to find out what had become of her? You didn't sit down to eat and drink and sleep, while she was a wanderer and an outcast?"

"We did everything, Richard," replied Mrs. James—her husband stood by speechless, staring at his brother with dumb compassion. "John Wort would tell us nothing about Mr.

Walgry; but he was very sorry for what had happened, and he went up to town to see Mr. Walgry, and taxed him with having tempted Grace away; and Mr. Walgry denied it. He knew nothing about her. He had never seen her since he left this house, he declared."

"Lying would come easy to the man who could tempt that child away. Was there no one else you suspected?"

"No one else."

And then little by little Hannah Redmayne told the whole story of Hubert Walgrave's residence at Brierwood. He had been attentive to Grace, it is true; but no more attentive than any man might be who happened to find himself in daily association with a very pretty girl. From first to last he had shown himself a gentleman. Mrs. Redmayne was emphatic upon that point. Then came the reluctant admission that Grace had drooped after his departure; and no one had thought of putting the two facts together. And then the story of the locket.

Richard Redmayne sat like a statue, with a dark frown upon his face, but no farther expression of his anger, while aunt Hannah rambled on helplessly. His heart was on fire with resentment against these kindred of his who had suffered his darling to be lost. In his mind it was a certain thing that they could have saved her, that she had perished by reason of their carelessness. But he said very little. Such a grief as his is apt to be dumb, and as yet there was a kind of numbness about his feelings that dulled the sense of grief. The news had stunned him.

When aunt Hannah had said all she could say, with no interruption save a few words mumbled now and then feebly by uncle James, Richard Redmayne rose abruptly and put on his hat.

"You're not going out to-night, Richard?" exclaimed his sister-in-law, glancing at the clock. It was half-past nine—a late hour according to Brierwood habits.

"I am going to John Wort. I am going to call him to account for this business."

"Don't be hard upon him, Rick," Mrs. James pleaded. "He did everything for the best."

"Hard upon him! Between you, you have let my daughter go to her ruin. Do you think there can be much softness in me for any one of you? Hard upon him; hard upon the man who sent a scoundrel into my house with a false character! I wish to God the days were not over when men shot each other down like dogs for a smaller injury."

"He's an old man, Richard, and has been a good friend to you. Remember that."

"I'll remember my daughter. You've no call to look so

scared, woman. I shall keep my hands off him. Nothing I could do to him would be any good to her. I want to find my daughter. Do you think any shame that has fallen upon her will lessen my love? I want to find her, that's all, to take her away with me to the other end of the world. Once let me hold her in my arms, I'll answer for the rest. There doesn't live upon this earth the man who could divide us; no, not if he was her husband."

He went out into the calm summer night, all the stars shining down upon him from the vault above, not with the fiery lustre of those planets which he had watched of late, but with a milder, holier beam, that touched his heart like a memory of the past. O, dear familiar garden, where he had been so happy with the child of his love! the dumb inanimate things cried out to him like living voices. The home-look of the place struck him with a sharper anguish than he had suffered yet. Everything was unchanged—and she was gone! He passed quickly through the garden, steeling himself against this anguish; out at the wicket-gate, through the fragrant meadow, and on by that footpath along which Grace had gone to her doom.

Kingsbury was awake yet. It was ten o'clock when Richard Redmayne crossed the common after half an hour's sharp walking; but the lights still trembled feebly in the general shop; and the three public-houses, which made a kind of fiery triangle, a terrestrial constellation on the village-green, were still in the full flush of trade.

How strange all things seemed to the wanderer, and yet how familiar! Had he been away half a century, or only a week? What a stagnant world it was compared to that he had lived in of late! It seemed as if the same village idlers were gossiping at the open door of the Coach and Horses; the same clumsy figure leaning against the doorpost, pipe in mouth; the same carrier's horse drinking at the trough.

He passed them by, with a sense of seeing them dimly as in a dream; yet even with this dreamlike feeling there was blended the thought of how he should have come upon this same spot, these same people, had all been well with him, their noisy welcome, their eager interest in him as an adventurer and a hero. He could see the picture of himself amidst a circle of curious friendly faces, telling the story of his travels. He passed them by unnoticed, and walked straight on to the green palings before Mr. Wort's trim dwelling—one of the neatest habitations in Kingsbury—a square box of a house, with dazzling green blinds, and a little flight of dazzling stone steps leading up to a great brass plate, so large as almost to extinguish the door that sustained it.

The land-steward was a bachelor, and throughout the period

of his mature manhood had sat on one chair, on one side of his hearth, so that he had worn a shabby patch in the carpet at that particular spot; and as Mr. Wort never, or hardly ever, received visitors, all the other chairs had spent their lifetime ranged with their backs against the walls of the small square parlour, and had the air of being immovable, and not intended for mankind to sit upon. That one side of the parlour hearth, and a corner of the mantelpiece whereon to put his pipe, and a little iron bedstead to sleep upon upstairs, comprised Mr. Wort's occupation of his own house. He took his meals in the kitchen; it saved messing in the parlour, his housekeeper told him—there being a notion current in Kingsbury that a parlour was an apartment too sacred for the vulgar uses of humanity. Perhaps Mr. Wort in his inmost heart rather preferred the kitchen to the parlour, with its bright Kidderminster carpet, and green-glass candlesticks, and basket of shell-flowers on the mantelpiece. For his actual work he had a little shed of an office, built out at the side of his house, where he paid wages and wrote letters on a battered old ink-stained desk.

There was a light in the window of this office; so Mr. Redmayne went straight to the narrow half-glass door, turned the handle, and went in.

John Wort was looking over a bundle of papers by the light of his office-lamp, frowning meditatively as he did his work. He looked up suddenly on the opening of the door, and at sight of Richard Redmayne started as if he had seen a ghost.

"Rick!" he cried. "Why, I thought you were in Australia!"

"Did you think that I was going to stay there for ever?" the farmer asked grimly. "I suppose you did, or you would hardly have turned go-between, and sent a villain into my house to ruin my daughter."

The steward bounded off his stool, crimson to the roots of his iron-gray hair.

"If any man upon earth but you said as much as that to me, Richard Redmayne, I'd knock him down."

"I want to know who this man is—by what right you put him into my house," the other went on, without the faintest notice of Mr. Wort's remonstrance.

"The man I introduced to your family is a gentleman. I had no reason to suppose that any harm would come of the introduction, nor have you any right to say that harm has come of it. He denies act or part in your daughter's disappearance, and I can see no evidence against him. He had been away from Brierwood two months and more when she left her home. There is nothing to connect him with the event."

"Who is he? Tell me that!" cried Richard Redmayne, with his back against the office-door, as if he would have barred

the steward's egress until he had heard what he wanted to hear.

"I shall tell you no more than you know already. I took the trouble to go up to town and see him about this business; taxed him with being concerned in your daughter's disappearance—in plain words, with being the man she went away to marry—and he denied it as plainly. I won't have him bothered any more about it. I'm very sorry for you, Richard Redmayne; and, upon my soul, I believe I loved your daughter Grace as well as if she'd been a child of my own; but I won't be the means of bringing about any mischief between you two."

"You mean that you won't tell me where to find him?"

"Certainly not. He has been taxed with the crime, and denies it. What more could you do than I have done?"

Richard Redmayne smiled—a smile that made the steward shiver.

"What do you think a father should do whose child has been stolen from him like that?" he asked. "Never mind what I could do. Tell me who he is and where I am to find him—that's all I want from you, John Wort."

"If you questioned me till doomsday, you'd get no more out of me than I've said already. The man is a gentleman—I can't believe him capable of playing the villain. What evidence is there against him? Why fix upon him in this savage way? Why must he needs be your daughter's only admirer? She was the prettiest girl for twenty miles round Kingsbury, and may have had half-a-dozen sweethearts."

"She was as pure as a child!" cried the farmer.

"Granted; but she may have listened to some gentleman-lover, for all that, and may have been tempted away by a promise of marriage. The man may have kept his word. She may be a happy married woman for anything we know to the contrary."

"That's not likely," said Richard Redmayne with a groan. "She wouldn't have kept aloof from those that loved her—if— if she wasn't ashamed to face them. But I won't stop to bandy words about my girl. Let me find her when and where I may, she can't have sunk so low but she'll be high enough to reach her father's heart; yet it's hard to think of such a flower trampled upon. Good-night, John Wort. I've counted you a friend for the last twenty years, and to-night you've taught me the value of friendship. By —, man, if it wasn't for your gray hairs, I'd wring the answers I want out of you as if you were a wet rag! And you fancy you'll prevent my finding that villain? Why, if London was twenty times bigger than it is, I'd hunt him down; or if he had turned his back on London and gone to the other end of the earth, I'd find him out. Be

sure of that, John Wort! and when I do find him, you'll hear of it."

He left the office as abruptly as he had entered it. The steward stood by his desk fumbling nervously with his papers, his eyes downcast, his aspect conscience-stricken. The criminal himself would have faced the situation boldly enough, no doubt; but this innocent accessory before the fact drooped under the burden of another man's evil-doing. He had loved Grace Redmayne, and had a warm regard for Grace's father. But he held it a duty to shield Hubert Walgrave—if he were indeed the offender; and who could be sure that he was, until Grace's own lips denounced him? At present there was so little evidence against him, and he had denied any knowledge of her flight. John Wort was strong upon this point; although, as a man of the world, he attached no great value to the denial.

"If a man had committed a murder, he'd hardly tell any one for the asking where he'd hidden the knife," the steward had remarked to his housekeeper and confidential adviser, an ancient dame much tormented by rheumatism, and attached to him by the bonds of consinship and long service.

"A pretty kettle-of-fish! And all brought about by doing that young man a kindness," he muttered by and by, as he sat with his papers before him, trying to bring back his mind to that calm level of businesslike meditation from which Richard Redmayne had disturbed him. "But he comes of a bad stock, and I ought to have known that no good could ever arise out of any dealings with that lot. He seemed so different from his father, though; such a steady studious kind of fellow. I had every reason to suppose he might be trusted."

CHAPTER XX.

"WHAT IS IT THAT YOU WOULD IMPART TO ME?"

WHEN the passage of time had familiarized Richard Redmayne with the fact of his loss, when he had grown a little more accustomed to the aspect of Brierwood without Grace—and at best it seemed to him like a house in which a corpse was lying—he was able to sum up the few facts that much questioning had elicited from Mrs. James.

The uttermost that she could tell him came to very little. She had fancied herself watchful and careful enough of her niece's honour, and had seen no ground for suspicion of the stranger's integrity.

"I don't think for the first three weeks I ever had my eyes off Grace while he was in the house," she said, defending herself against her brother-in-law's charge of neglect, "for fear he should be turning her head with foolish compliments, or anything of that kind."

"For the first three weeks?" echoed Richard Redmayne bitterly; "and after that I suppose you shut your eyes and ears, and let him say what he pleased to her."

"I mayn't have watched them quite so close, Richard. I knew Grace was a good girl, and he seemed a perfect gentleman; fifteen years older than her, too, if he was an hour; and wrapped up in his books."

And then Hannah Redmayne told the story of that vanished summer-time as it had seemed to her unpoetic mind—a bald bare outline of commonplace facts, which evoked no image in the brain of the listener. There had been a picnic, and Mr. Walgry had been attentive to Grace, but not remarkably attentive. She had fainted, and he had been sorry, and very kind. And shortly after leaving Brierwood he had sent her a handsome gold locket, as an acknowledgment of her aunt's attention to him. That was all: let Richard Redmayne make out of it what he might.

He could make very little of it: only that his daughter was gone from him, and that this was the only man who had come athwart her pathway.

Investigation showed him that the means his brother and his brother's wife had taken to find the missing girl were of the slightest. James had gone up to London, and had consulted an old schoolfellow, a solicitor in a very obscure way of business, who had sent him to a private inquiry office. The chief of the private-inquiry office had said "advertise," and had opened an eager paw for funds with which to pay for advertisements; but this James Redmayne had positively refused to do. He didn't want the whole county of Kent to know that his niece had gone astray. The private inquirer had suggested that his advertisement might be so worded as to be intelligible only to the niece herself; but James was inflexible. To advertise was to publish the family dishonour—if dishonour it were.

"No," he said doggedly; "if you can't find Gracey without putting her in the papers, I'll wait till her father comes home. He'll find her fast enough, I'll warrant."

Simple-hearted James had an inordinate faith in his brother Rick. Whatever mortal man could do, Rick could do; and the service of professional private inquirers would be as nothing compared with the untutored intelligence of Richard Redmayne.

The first thing Richard did was to advertise in the *Times*, two other London daily papers, and the two local weeklies:—

"GRACE.—Your father is at home. Return, or write. Love welcome, pardon."

The advertisement appeared day after day, week after week, month after month. People speculated about it, became familiar with the sight of it, and at last came to regard it as a standing portion of their journal, like the printer's name and address at the foot of the last column. And while they speculated and wondered, and anon grew indifferent, Richard Redmayne paced the streets of London in the long summer days, and far into the dismal autumn, looking for his daughter and his daughter's seducer.

He did not even know the name of the man he wanted to find. Hannah Redmayne had never called her lodger anything but Mr. Walgry, and it was as Mr. Walgry she described him to her brother-in-law. When asked to write the name, she made several wild attempts, and in every one of them lost herself in a labyrinth of consonants. She could have as easily written the titles of John Milton's prose works.

"How should I know how to spell his name?" she exclaimed at last, feeling that those various combinations of consonants hardly looked feasible. "I never saw it wrote anywhere, and I never was much of a hand at writing. I can keep my dairy accounts with any one, and keep 'em correct to a sixpence; but it ain't likely I should be able to write a name as I've never seen wrote. I know he was called Walgry, and that's all I do know about it."

It was for a man called Walgry, therefore, that Richard Redmayne made his search; a hunter not gifted with those attributes most needed for the following an obscure trail and the tracking down of a foe, but with an indomitable resolution, and a firm belief in his own power to discover the man who had wronged him.

He looked for a man called Walgry, ignorant of almost every particular of the man's existence, assisted only by the faintest word-picture of the being whom he sought; and behold, even the man called Walgrave had vanished off the face of the earth so far as the name is the man, and had given place to H. W. Harcross, Q. C., of Mastodon-crescent, Grosvenor-place; an elliptical arc of newly-built mansions, a little more florid in their architectural embellishment than the mansions of Acropolis-square, but cast more or less in the same mould. Hubert Walgrave was gone, and there remained only this H. W. Harcross, popularly known as the man who had married old Vallory's daughter. The time had yet to come in which the barrister should make a reputation strong enough to outweigh his wife's fortune.

There is no need to dwell upon those dreary days, and the heart-break that came with them. The strong man, who had

returned from his two years' exile full of pride and triumph, was not broken yet, was indeed of a stuff not easily crushed; but there were gray streaks in the yeoman's dark-brown hair, deeply-cut lines about the bright gray eyes, a look of settled weariness in his face, as of one who has hoped against hope until the faculty of hoping has been worn out of him.

He had not been content with that advertisement in the London and Kentish papers, but he had advertised in *Galvani* and other foreign journals. His appeal had been published so widely that it seemed hardly possible it could have escaped Grace's notice—and *could* she see it and resist his prayer?

He had written to Nicholas Spettigue by the first mail that left England after his return, entreating his late partner to hunt up any letters that might have arrived for him before or after he quitted the colony; and Mr. Spettigue had made all necessary inquiries, and had duly forwarded him James Redmayne's laboured epistle containing the tidings of Grace's flight: but no other letter—not that promised letter which the girl herself was to have written to her father.

Meanwhile, during all this bitter period of hope deferred and fast-coming despair, Bulrush Meads, the new estate which was to have been the delight and glory of Rick Redmayne's declining years, lay waste, or flourished only for the advantage of strangers. It was vital that the farm should be taken in hand speedily, boundaries settled, fences put up, order introduced where all was now only a fruitful wilderness. The consciousness of this was a secondary source of worry and perplexity to the man whose chief absorbing thought was of his missing child. All his dreams had faded. The vision was darkened of that low wide-spreading log-house, with its light verandahs and broad balconies and its romantic aspect, like a Swiss chalet. That airy castle was shattered. He might live to build it up again, he told himself, in his more hopeful moods, when he had found his daughter; but in the interval those fertile acres, for which he had paid with the sweat of his brow, were lying waste.

He decided on sending his brother and his brother's family to take the estate in hand. He was fain to confess that James and those two hulking sons of his had done wonders with Brierwood. What might they not do in that wider, richer field? He could manage the Kentish farm himself, and keep a home open for his lost girl—the room in which she had slept from her infancy to the fatal hour of her flight ready to receive her.

He mooted the question one evening, when he had come down from his London lodging to the farm for a few hours' respite—painted a glowing picture of Bulrush Meads, but spoke with a latent bitterness, remembering all the schemes and hopes that had been associated with his possession of the place. His pro-

posal was at first received with horror by Mrs. James, who was the sole voice of the assembly, no member of her family presuming to think or speak for himself in her presence. What! leave Brierwood, and the country in which she had been born and bred, to go and associate with red Indians—people who scalped each other and lived in wigwams, or if not red Indians, something quite as bad—Blackamoors perhaps! She would sooner starve than taste a bit of victuals that had been touched by a Blackamoor.

Rick Redmayne explained that the Blackamoor element need not enter into the business. The aboriginal Australian might be dark of aspect, but did not abound in the vicinity of Bulrush Meads; emigration was the order of the day; she could have plenty of stalwart Irishmen to till her lands and reap her corn.

"I think I'd as lief have to do with Blackamoors as Irish," cried Mrs. James. "It's bad enough to have 'em about at hopping time."

By slow degrees, however, when the map of the estate with all poor Rick's notations, suggestions, and calculations made on board ship had been laid out on the table, and pored over profoundly by James and the lads, who might have their opinions, but remained discreetly dumb—when the extent and glory of the estate, and the managing powers required for its direction, had been brought home to her, Mrs. James softened, listened with increasing interest, began to ask questions about this portion of the land and that, and seemed curious as to the capabilities of the house.

"It would be a fine opening for the boys," James growled at last, perceiving that his chosen partner wavered.

"A fine opening for their galloping about from morning till night shooting wild beasts," said the mother of the boys, contemptuously; "a deal of work they'd do in an outlandish place like that."

It was Mrs. Redmayne's manner to speak with contumely of the two sons, whom, in her secret soul, she doated on, urged thereto by a sense of maternal duty. So no doubt did Cornelia flout and disparage her Gracchi in their adolescence.

Her speech had for once been injudicious. At the prospect of much slaying of savage beasts the two boys broke out into broad grins and unctuous chuckles expressive of rapture.

"Crikey, wouldn't that be a jolly game!" cried the elder hope. "It ain't often old Wort lets us have a pop at the rabbits in Clevedon Chase, and out yonder there'd be wild buffaloes and kangaroos, and the Lord knows what to shoot at; eh, uncle?"

"Out yonder," cried Richard, kindling at the thought of that wider world where he had been so successful—"out yonder you'd have as much sport as the kings and their barons had in the days

when half England was forest, and it was death for a peasant to kill a stag. You may buy a horse over there, and a good one, for a five-pound note, and may keep as good a stud as Squire Chunleigh without feeling the cost. Why, you don't know what life is, boys, till you have lived under the Southern Cross!"

"What kind of a dairy is there, now, at this Bulrush place?" Mrs. James asked, thoughtfully.

The boys kicked each other in a friendly way under the table, perceiving that she was veering round.

"Well, there's nothing very ship-shape yet awhile; but there's plenty of room and plenty of material, and I shouldn't mind spending a hundred or so on the improvement of the place."

The idea of a dairy of her own planning was almost as tempting to Mrs. James as that vision of perpetual wild-beast slaughter was to the two lads. The dairy at Brierwood was all holes and corners, she said, with not room in it to swing a cat, though there were inlets enough through which the cats could come to steal the cream. An archetypal dairy had always been one of the matron's pet day-dreams. The ocean was an untried element, which she regarded with a natural aversion; but if anything could tempt her to cross the world in search of perfect bliss, it would be that idea of a farmhouse adapted and improved on her own plan.

So, after much debating of difficulties which at first seemed insurmountable, Hannah Redmayne consented to the enterprise; and with her the whole family: the young men having panted for Australia from the moment the subject was started; James, their father, with the docility of a well-trained husband. If Hannah saw it in a favourable light, why, he had no "objections," he said, in his milk-and-waterish way. He made no doubt but he would be useful as his brother's agent, biding the time when Rick would come out himself and lick the land into a fair shape. He hadn't much of a fancy for a sea voyage, never having trusted himself on wilder floods than Thames or Medway; but as other folks made light enough of going to Australia, and Rick himself had been there and come back safe and sound, there was no call for him to make any bones about it. In brief, he expressed himself willing to do whatsoever his wife and his brother desired.

All things were settled, therefore, before that evening's counsel was concluded. James and his family were to go out to Melbourne as soon as their travelling arrangements could be made, and thence to Bulrush Meads, where they were to take possession and establish themselves with full power to order all things according to their own discretion. By and by, when Grace was restored to him—Richard Redmayne spoke of that event as a certain fact—he would in all probability let Brierwood, and bring

his daughter to that wild home in the backwoods; but his coming would in no wise disturb or dispossess James and Hannah. There would be ample room and verge enough for the two families.

"We've worked together pretty well so far, Jim," said Rick, "and there's no reason we shouldn't go on. You can manage the and well for me, and make a good living out of it for yourself; and by and by, when I come out, I'll make you my partner, with as big a share of the profits as if you had contributed half the capital."

The family, with one accord, pronounced this a very handsome offer, and they shook hands upon it all round. Up in their attic that night in the gabled roof, the two lads felt scarcely disposed to go to bed, so completely had this scheme of emigration taken hold of them. They would fain have begun packing their clumsy wooden trunks immediately, and neither rested nor slumbered till they were on board ship.

"There ain't any overland way to Australia, is there, Jack?" the younger inquired, curiously.

John Redmayne opined that there was not.

"I'm sorry for that," said Charley; "it would have been a jolly game to ride half the way on camels!"

Within a month from this family conference, Mr. and Mrs. James and their two sons departed with bag and baggage, after a farewell visit from the married daughter and her bantlings, who came from Chickfield to weep and lament over this uprooting of her race from the soil that had nourished it. The Chickfield grocer came to fetch his wife home, and gave utterance to ambitious and revolutionary views of his own with reference to the great colony. He had it in him, he avowed, to do great things in a new country: had ideas about mixed teas and the improvement of coffee in connection with roasted beans; to say nothing of the manipulation of Dorset butter, for which he had a peculiar gift—only to be developed in a wider sphere than Chickfield, where the prejudices and narrow-mindedness of his customers stifled every aspiration of genius.

They went. Rick Redmayne stood upon the pier at Gravesend and saw the great ship fade into a speck on the blue horizon, and felt that on this side of the world he was now alone—with his daughter.

The year had well-nigh come to an end before the yeoman's courage and confidence in himself wore out; but in the dreary December days, after so many futile efforts, so many false hopes, he did at last begin to lose faith in his own power to find his child or his child's seducer, and to cast about him for help. From the first he had kept his own counsel—telling no one his grief, asking no aid from sage advisers by way of friendship or

profession. He wanted to keep his daughter's secret inviolate—his daughter's name from the breath of scandal. No one but those of his own household knew the address of his London lodging—a darksome second floor in a street near the Strand—or the nature of the business that detained him in London. He had paid all his debts, and shaken hands with his creditors and thanked them for their forbearance; had seen little more of his Kingsbury friends or acquaintance since his return from Australia. So far as it was possible he held himself aloof from all who had ever known him. Finally, however, after six months wasted in vain endeavours to discover some trace of his lost daughter, the conviction came slowly home to him that his own brave heart and strong arm were not enough for the work he had to do. He went to a solicitor—a man who had arranged some small business matters for him occasionally—and put a case hypothetically, as if in the interest of a friend.

A young woman was missing, had run away from home to be married, and had never been heard of since. What steps should the father take?

Mr. Smoothey, the solicitor—Gabb and Smoothey, Gray's-in-rubbed his chin meditatively.

"How long has the young woman been missing?" he asked.

"Thirteen months."

"A long time. Your friend should have gone to work sooner.

"My friend has been at work for the last six months."

Mr. Smoothey looked at his client sharply from under pent-house-like pepper-and-salt-coloured eye-brows, and suspected the real state of the case.

"What has he been doing during that time?" he inquired.

"Looking for his daughter everywhere: in public places, churches, theatres, parks, streets, omnibuses, shops, up and down, here and there, from morning till night, till his body has grown as weary as his heart; day after day, week after week, month after month, without rest or respite."

"Pshaw!" cried the lawyer, impatiently. "Your friend might live in one street and his daughter in the next for a twelvemonth, and the two never come across each other. The man must be mad. To look for a girl in London, without any plan or system; why, the proverbial needle in a bottle of hay must be an easy find compared to that. Your friend must be daft, Redmayne."

"He has had enough trouble to make him so," the farmer answered quietly.

"I'm heartily sorry for him. But to go to work in that irregular way, instead of getting good advice at the outset! In the first place, how does he know that his daughter is in London? How does he know that she isn't in New York?"

"He has some reason to suppose that she is in London. The man who is suspected of tempting her away is a man who lives in London."

"But, bless my soul, if you—if your friend knows the man who ran away with the girl, he can surely find her by applying to the man."

"The man who is suspected denies any knowledge of my daughter——"

Richard Redmayne stopped suddenly, and reddened to the temples.

"The murder's out," he said. "It's *my* daughter who's missing, Mr. Smoothey. You'll keep my secret, of course. I want to shield her from slander by and by, when I take her home."

"I guessed as much before you'd said half-a-dozen words about the business," remarked the lawyer, in a friendly reassuring tone; "your face was too earnest for a man who's talking of a friend's affairs. The more candid you are with me, the better I can help you."

On this Rick Redmayne told his story, as briefly as it could be told, while the lawyer listened, with a grave and not unsympathetic countenance.

"Have you any grounds for supposing that there would be no marriage; that this Mr. Walgry would deceive your daughter?" he asked, when he had heard all.

"Only the fact of my daughter's silence. If—if all had been well, she would have hardly left her father in doubt as to her fate. My poor child knew how well I loved her. And then a man who meant to act honestly would scarcely steal a girl away from her home like that."

"The manner of the business, and the girl's silence, look bad, I admit," replied Mr. Smoothey. "Her letter stated that they were to be married in London, you say—you might give me a copy of that letter, by the way. Have you made any attempt to discover whether such a marriage took place?"

"How could I do that?"

"Advertise for information on the subject, offering a reward to parish clerks, registrars, and suchlike."

"What! and blazon my girl's dishonour to the world?"

Mr. Smoothey smiled ever so faintly at this—as if the world at large were interested in the fate of a Kentish yeoman's daughter.

"You could hardly advertise without making the girl's name public, certainly," he said; "and that might do her mischief in the future. The written word remains. Put in an advertisement in to-morrow's *Times* about Tom, Dick, or Harry, and the odds are five to one it may crop up as evidence against Tom, Dick, or Harry at the other end of the world forty years hence.

Upon my word, Mr. Redmayne, I can't see that you have any resource open to you except to put yourself in the hands of one of these private-inquiring people."

"My brother Jim did that, and no good came out of it."

"Never mind what your brother did. I know a man who can help you, if any one can; as sharp a fellow as there is to be found in London. He served his articles with me, and practised as a solicitor for nine years in a small town in the west of England; took to drinking, and went altogether to the bad; then came up to London, and set up as a private enquirer. He drinks still, but has some method in his madness, and can do more work in his own particular line than any other man I ever met with. I'll have him here to meet you, if you like, to-morrow morning, and we can talk the business over together."

"I suppose I can't do better than put myself in your hands," Richard Redmayne said gloomily. "I reckoned upon finding my girl myself; but I'm sick at heart. I feel as if a few months more of this work would make an end of me."

Mr. Smoothey suggested that fathers and daughters are in the hands of Providence, and that things must not be looked at in this manner.

"What!" cried Rick, "do you want me to think that my child and I are like two pieces upon a chessboard, to be moved this way or that, with no power of our own to shape our lives? I tell you, man, I *will* find her, *will* save her, *will* take her from the villain who stole her away from me!"

"May God prosper your endeavours, my good friend!" said the lawyer, piously; "but that is hardly a Christian way of looking at the question."

"I have never been a Christian since I came home to England, and found my daughter missing," answered Richard Redmayne.

He met Mr. Kendel, the private inquirer, at Messrs. Gabb and Smoothey's office early next morning. Mr. Kendel was a tall bony man of about forty, with dark close-cut hair, a long red nose, a coal black eye of fiery brightness, glittering as that of the Ancient Mariner, a clean-shaven visage, a good black coat, and as respectable an appearance as could co-exist with the aforesaid red nose; a clever-looking man, in whose hands Richard Redmayne felt himself a very child.

He jotted down two or three memoranda in a little black-bound note-book, and then snapped the snap thereof with the air of a man who saw his way to the end of the business.

"If a marriage took place in London, I shall have the evidence of it in a week," he said. "If anywhere in England, I pledge myself to know all about it within a fortnight." And on this the council broke up, Mr. Smoothey having done

nothing but take snuff and look ineffectually wise during the consultation.

At the end of a fortnight Mr. Kendel wrote to Richard Redmayne, stating that to the best of his belief no marriage between Miss Grace Redmayne and any individual whatever had been celebrated within the British dominions since last November twelvemonth. He had put the business into good hands on the Continent, and hoped shortly to be able to speak as definitely with regard to any foreign marriage which might or might not have been contracted. In the meantime he was hunting for information about Mr. Walgry, but as yet had not been able to get on the track of any person of that name answering to the description of the suspected party.

Richard flung the letter from him in a rage.

"Easy enough to tell me what he can't find out," he muttered to himself moodily. "Jim was about right; these fellows are no good."

He left Mr. Kendel's letter unanswered, and went on with his own unsystematic wanderings: now in the remotest purlieus of the east, or in the haunts of sailors at Wapping and Ratcliff-highway; now among half-deserted western squares, whose denizens were spending their Christmas holidays at pleasant country houses. He sat in sparsely-filled theatres, indifferent to, nay hardly conscious of, what he saw, but peering into every dusky corner of the house, with the faint hope of seeing the sweet pale face he was looking for.

Christmas came and went. Richard Redmayne heard the joy-bells clamouring from half a hundred London steeples, and that was all. Christmas—O God, how well he remembered Christmas at Brierwood a few years ago, his daughter's face radiant among the holly and mistletoe, the simple pleasures and banquetings, the quiet home joys!

"Shall we ever sit beside that hearth again?" he wondered; "we two together, my girl and I?"

Bitter as this ignorance of his child's fate had been to him, a bitterer knowledge was to come. One bleak morning in January, about five weeks after his introduction to Mr. Kendel, the office-boy from Gabb and Smoothey brought him a brief note, requesting his immediate presence in Gray's-inn-place.

He followed promptly on the heels of the messenger, and was shown straight into Mr. Smoothey's office. The lawyer was standing on his hearth-rug warming himself with a solemn aspect. Mr. Kendel was seated by the table with a short file of newspapers before him.

"You have got some news for me," Richard Redmayne cried eagerly, going straight up to the private inquirer.

"Do not be in a hurry, my dear Mr. Redmayne," the lawyer

said soothingly. "There is news: Kendel has made a discovery, as he supposes; but the fact in question, if it does concern you, is of the saddest nature. I am bound to bid you prepare your mind for the worst."

"My God!" cried Richard Redmayne. "It is the thing I have thought and dreamed of a hundred times. My daughter has destroyed herself!"

"Not so bad as that. Pray sit down; calm yourself. We may be mistaken."

"The date is the same," said Kendel gravely. "Miss Redmayne left home on the 11th November."

"Was your daughter a sufferer from heart-disease, Mr. Redmayne?"

"No—certainly not, to my knowledge. But her mother died of it; dropped down dead at four-and-twenty years of age. Why do you beat about the bush? Is my daughter dead?"

"We have some reason to fear as much; but I repeat we may be mistaken. The fact of the two events occurring on the same date might be a mere coincidence. You had better read those paragraphs, Kendel. Let Mr. Redmayne know the worst."

Mr. Kendel turned over the papers rather nervously. He was accustomed to be employed in painful affairs; but this seemed to him more painful than the common run of family troubles. Richard Redmayne's listening face, white to the lips, told of no common agony.

"It appears," he began in a quiet business-like way, "that Miss Redmayne left her home early on the morning of the 11th November. From that hour to this nothing has been heard of her. Now, having occasion some days ago to look through a file of old newspapers in relation to another case I have on hand, I came upon the notice of an inquest held on a young lady who died suddenly on that day—a young lady whose christian name was Grace, and whose age was nineteen; a young lady who had arrived in the neighbourhood of London from the country, within an hour of her death. Shall I read you the account of the inquest?"

"Yes."

The word came with a strange muffled sound from dry white lips.

Mr. Kendel read first one paragraph, and then two or three others, from different papers. One was more diffuse than the rest, a small weekly paper published at Highgate. This gave a detailed account of the inquest—headed, "Sad and sudden Death of a young Lady,"—and dwelt on the beauty of the deceased with the penny-a-liner's flourish.

"The man called himself Walsh," Richard Redmayne said at last, "and describes the girl as his sister."

"He would be likely to suppress his real name under such painful circumstances, and to conceal his real relation with the young lady. Mind, I don't say that this poor girl must needs have been your daughter—coincidences are common enough in this life; but the christian name, the age, the date all agree. Even the initial is the same—Walgry, Walsh. Come, Mr. Redmayne, it is a hard thing to trace your daughter's steps only to find the track broken off short by a grave; but not so hard as to find your child, as many a man has done, in something worse than the grave."

This was quite a burst of sentiment for Mr. Kendel; but his heart, not utterly dried up by alcohol, was touched by the silent grief of the yeoman. That despair, which betrayed itself only by the ghastly change in the man's face, the altered sound of the man's voice, was more awful than any loud expression of sorrow.

"Do you consider this clue worth following up, Mr. Redmayne?"

"Yes, I will follow it, and the murderer of my child afterwards," answered the yeoman.

He sat down at the table by Mr. Kendel's side, and wrote the name of the coroner and some particulars of the inquest in his pocket-book. The private inquirer watched him curiously, wondering a little at the firmness of his hand as he wrote.

"Shall I follow up this affair for you, Mr. Redmayne?" he asked.

"No, I'll do that myself. If—if the girl who died that day was my daughter, I am the likeliest person to find it out; but if I fail, I can fall back upon your professional skill. You shall be paid your own price for what you have done."

"Thank you, sir. I wish with all my heart I could have brought you pleasanter news. Have you any photograph of your daughter, by the way? That would help you to settle the question."

"Yes. I have her portrait," answered Richard Redmayne, touching his breast. He had carried his daughter's picture in his breast-pocket all through his Australian wanderings; only a rustic photographer's image, a small wistful face, which would hardly be taken for the face of a beautiful woman, colour, life, expression—so much that made the beauty of the original being wanting in this pale reflection.

It was settled, therefore, that Mr. Redmayne should go to Highgate himself, hunt up the coroner, and follow the clue afforded by those newspaper paragraphs as far as it might lead him.

He went, found the coroner, and the doctor who had been called in at Hillside Cottage, when Grace lay dead in her lover's arms. From this latter he obtained a close description of the dead girl—the fair oval face, small nose and mouth, a little mole just under the rounded chin, the reddish-auburn hair.

There was no doubt it was his Grace. He had tracked her to the end of her brief pilgrimage. All his dreams of the future were over; the fair home in which they were to have begun a

new life together, all the plans and hopes which had buoyed him up during that weary period of waiting, were done with now. Alas, whatever life they two were to share lay beyond the stars! Upon earth his search had ended.

"Except for the man who murdered her," Rick Redmayne said to himself. "God grant that I may live long enough to be even with him!"

He went to the house in which his darling died. There had been more than one set of tenants since that November day; but the cottage was vacant again, and a board advertising the fact of its emptiness was up in the neat little front garden: "Inquire of Mr. Selby, house-agent, Kentish-town; or within."

Richard Redmayne went in, saw the little drawing-room where she had fallen, struck with death; the pretty bedchamber above where they had laid her in her last quiet slumber. He looked at these things with an anguish beyond tears—beyond passion, or curses even—although deep in his heart there was something bitterer than a curse against her betrayer.

"Perhaps that man Kendel was right," he said to himself, as he stood by the white-curtained bed, on which he could fancy her lying in death's awful stillness with her hands folded on her breast; "perhaps it was better she should die than live to be what that villain meant to make her. Thank God she never was his mistress! thank God death came between them! And yet to have had my girl again—even a faded flower—to have watched the pale face grow bright again! to have made a new life for her in a new world—O God, how sweet that would have been!"

He thought of Bulrush Meads; those fertile slopes and valleys, the silver water-courses and forest background—all their glory gone now. Thought of the place as he had pictured it from the first, with that central figure, the child of his love. Without it what availed those green pastures, those crystal streams? what were they but a desert waste without Grace?

An old woman was taking care of the house, an ancient bel-dame, with one shoulder higher than the other.

"I helped 'em to lay her out, poor dear!" she mumbled, when Richard questioned her about the young lady who had died suddenly in that house a little more than a year ago. "Such a pretty creetur', with lovely auburn hair down to her waist. I never see her alive, though I was here when the gentleman took the house."

"You saw him, then?" Richard cried eagerly.

"I should think I did. I sor him arter she was dead. O, so gashly pale—paler than the corpse a'most, and so orful quiet. Ah, it was a queer set-out altogether! When he took the house, it was for his young wife, he said; when the ingquiss come, it

was his sister. Whatever she was, he was precious fond of her. I was in the house till a hour before they came, helping the servants to finish the cleanin' and suchlike; and to see the things as he'd sent in—flowers, and hothouse fruit, and partials of all sorts; birds, and a pianer that was a perfect pictur' only to look at. Yes, whoever she was, he was rare and fond of her."

"May the memory of her cling to him to his dying day," muttered Rick Redmayne, "poison his life, and blight him on his deathbed!"

The crone was too deaf to hear this smothered imprecation. She went on mumbling about the "sweet young creetur'."

"What was the man like?" Mr. Redmayne asked her presently.

"Mr. Walsh?"

"Yes, Mr. Walsh."

"Rather a handsome man. Tall and straight and dark—not so young as she was by ten year or more, but a fine-lookin' man."

"Do you know what became of him after the inquest?"

"No more than the babe unborn. He paid a month's rent, packed up all the silk dresses, and slippers, and suchlike, into a big portmenter, had it put on the top of a keb, and rode away with it. The kebmán as took him would know where he went—none of us knowed."

"And you don't know where the cabman came from, I suppose?"

"Lord, no, sir; he was fetched promiscuous. Mr. Walsh paid for everythink liberal; paid the cook and 'ousemaid their month, and paid me; paid the undertaker—it were a very genteel funeral, mourning-coach and pair, and feathers on the 'earse; paid everybody, and nobody ast him no questions. But it was a queer set-out for all that; and there must have been some think to make that pore young creetur' go off dead like that."

"Something," muttered Richard; "yes—only a broken heart. She discovered that she had trusted a villain, and the discovery killed her. The story's plain enough."

This to himself rather than to the crone, whose dull ears did, however, distinguish those two words, "broken heart."

"Broken 'art? Yes, pore dear," she whined, "that's azackly what the 'ousemaid says, while we was a-smoothing out her beautiful hair: 'There was somethink as he told her—a some think as he said to her soon after she came in—as broke her pore 'art;' and that 'ousemaid spoke the Gospel truth. It might be a diseased 'art, there's no gainsaying the doctor; but it were a broken one into the bargain."

Two hours later on the same afternoon, when the winter day-

light was growing gray and thick, Richard Redmayne stood alone in Hetheridge churchyard: a very quiet resting-place, remote, although within fifteen miles of London, the burial-ground belonging to a village that lay off the main road, away from the beaten tracks of mankind—an unambitious grave-yard, where there were no splendid monuments, only an air of supreme repose.

"There will be no stone to mark where she lies, I reckon," Mr. Redmayne said to himself bitterly, as he walked slowly to and fro among the humble head-stones. "A man would hardly set up a memorial of his sin."

He was mistaken. Not in a nameless grave did Grace Redmayne slumber. He came at last to a broad slab of polished gray granite, with an inscription in three short lines:

GRACE.

Died November 11th, 186—, aged 19.

EHU, EHU!

Her epitaph could hardly have been briefer: and thus her story closed—with a tombstone.

"I wonder where *he* will be buried when his time comes?" thought Rick Redmayne; "for, as there is a God above us, if ever we two meet face to face, I shall kill him!"

And he meant it.

CHAPTER XXI.

A COLD AND LOVELESS UNION.

MR. and Mrs. Harcross lived in an intensely new house in an intensely new neighbourhood. There are people who have an instinctive love of ancient habitations, whose souls yearn for ivy-clad manor-houses and moated granges: who languish for the narrow windows and red-brick fronts of Queen Anne, and are thrilled with delight by the oriels and mullions of Elizabeth; people who would endure any inconvenience for the sake of knowing that the curled darlings of the Restoration had held their orgies in the dining-room, or that fair dames in hoop and wimple had made their bower in the best bedroom; people who would smile calmly while the water came through every ceiling, if the house was warranted to have been part of a favourite palace of Anna Boleyn's; and, O dear, how many favourite abiding-places Henry VIII., Anna Boleyn, and Elizabeth seem to have had scattered over the face of the country

Augusta Vallory was not one of these enthusiasts of antiquity. Her ideas, likings, and dislikings, were essentially modern. A house could not be too new for her. She liked to see the walls fresh from the trowel of the plasterer, to choose every yard of paper-hanging, to know that no inferior clay had ever been sheltered by the roof that was to cover her own superior head.

"I hardly like the idea of a house other people have lived in," she said; "especially if there are cupboards; they generally leave an odour!"

So when, prior to their marriage, Hubert Walgrave suggested one of the pleasant streets between Grosvenor-square and Park-lane—Upper Brook-street, or Green-street, for example—Miss Vallory shook her head peremptorily.

"My dear Hubert, all those houses are as old as the hills," she exclaimed; "there would be beetles, and all kind of horrors."

Mr. Walgrave ventured to hint that the class of people who lived in Upper Brook-street would hardly submit to beetles—in the drawing-rooms, or on the principal staircase, that is to say.

"Putting beetles out of the question, Hubert, I know for a certainty that there are people in Upper Brook-street who let lodgings. It is quite impossible that you and I can live—what is that horrid expression? cheek by jowl?—cheek by jowl with a lodging-house. Now, in the new district on the Marquis of Westminster's estate——"

Mr. Walgrave made a wry face.

"I abominate new houses," he said.

"That is to say, you abominate cleanliness and convenience. You might just as reasonably say one thing as the other. Near Grosvenor-place we can get a house fit for people of some position; a house in which I shall not be ashamed to receive my friends; and, of course, we must have our evenings, Hubert."

"Our evenings! Of course, my dear Augusta; I shall make a point of spending my evenings at home, if you wish it."

"I don't mean that. I shall expect you to stay at home after dinner naturally, when we have no engagements; but I mean an evening a week for reception."

"O, a 'Tuesday,' or a 'Thursday,'" said Mr. Walgrave, with another wry face. "Do you think that kind of thing pays, Augusta? To be obliged to stop at home on one particular evening, and have no end of candles burning, and to see a pack of people come straggling in, in an inane kind of way, with the air of performing a social duty and not expecting to get anything to eat—do you really think it pays? Isn't it rather a treadmillish kind of entertainment?"

"I don't know why my friends should only 'straggle' in,"

Miss Vallory said, with rather an offended air; "I trust they would come willingly."

"O, no doubt, as willingly as any one ever does come to that undecided sort of entertainment. Still, to my mind, it is always more or less treadmillish; and then there is the wear and tear of brain you go through all the week in trying to secure something a little out of the common—some pianist who lets off louder fireworks than the general run of pianists; some literary swell who has just published a successful book; or an astronomical swell who has discovered a new planet; or a legal swell who is leading counsel in the latest sensational trial; or a crack physician who has just got a baronetcy; some one to stare at and whisper about. Seriously, Augusta, don't you think we might get off with three or four dinner-parties and a ball in the course of the season?"

"I hardly know what you mean by 'getting off,' Hubert. I like to see my friends, and I hope they like to see me."

Mr. Walgrave shrugged his shoulders, with that accustomed air of polite indifference with which he was wont to end any dispute with his betrothed.

"My love, if you like to establish a hebdomadal treadmill in your drawing-room, I cannot possibly object," he said lightly.

So the house in Mastodon-crescent was taken, on a seven years' lease; quite a small house for that region of mighty mansions. There were only nine bedrooms on the four upper floors, three bath-rooms, and some little stunted passages, with narrow pinched grates squeezed into corners, which were *par excellence* dressing-rooms. On the ground-floor there was the regulation dining-room, with a gloomy den behind, which was to be the library and sulking-chamber of the master of the house. The first floor was absorbed by the drawing-rooms, which were as the Acropolis-square drawing-rooms, with a difference that was hardly perceptible to the indifferent eyes of Mr. Walgrave. There was the grand piano, the vast tract of velvet pile, dotted with serpentine-backed occasional chairs, dos-à-dos, vis-à-vis, coude-à-coude, and other species of the sofa tribe. There was an ottoman which was twin brother to the Acropolis-square ottoman; there were stands for portfolios of engravings and photographs—the minds of Miss Vallory's friends requiring to be sustained by engravings and photographs, as their bodies by coffee or ices.

Hubert Walgrave looked round the room with the merest casual glance when he came with his future wife to see what a fashionable upholsterer had done for the house which was to be his home during the next seven years. If it had been a question of lodging there a week, his gaze could have hardly been more listless.

"Are you satisfied, Hubert?" Miss Vallory asked, after half

had given her own opinion about the carpet, and condemned a chair or two.

"My dear, I am supremely satisfied if you are pleased. There is such a family likeness in drawing-rooms, that one comes to lose a good deal of one's interest in them. At Sir Daniel Dundee's summer lodge at Richmond there is no drawing-room, only a vast library with a bay-window looking on to the Thames; and if I were gratifying my own fancy in a house, I would have no drawing-room. I would give the largest room the house contained to my books: a room to read in, to think in, to live in; and if it were my unlucky lot to have many visitors, I would receive them in a winter-garden."

"I trust your fancy will be gratified in this house," said Augusta, "and I do wish you would not speak of it in that cold way, as if it belonged to some one else."

"A London house has no individuality, at least not a modern London house. Let us make it what we may, we should find the same kind of thing next door. I daresay I might walk into any dining-room in this crescent, sit down, and make myself at home, and not discover my mistake till a strange footman came in with the coal-scuttle."

They ascended to the second floor, and made a tour of the chief bedroom, Mrs. Harcross's dressing-room, Mrs. Harcross's boudoir, Mrs. Harcross's bath-room; Mr. Harcross's dressing- and bath-room—both in one—was on the floor above, and approached by the servants' staircase, the principal staircase breaking short off at the second floor. Happily, Mr. Walgrave Harcross was not a Sybarite, and made no objection to the secondary staircase.

"I am sorry they were obliged to put you on the next story, Hubert," Augusta said apologetically; "but they could not contrive my rooms any other way. A boudoir is no use unless it is next one's dressing-room. *En revanche*, I give you up the library altogether; I even told them to arrange the ventilation for smoking."

"That was very considerate. Yes; I shall be glad of a den in which I can smoke my cigar. I shall import some of my books from the Temple immediately I take possession."

They wandered in and out of the rooms. The boudoir was the prettiest room in the house: all dainty fluted chintz rose-buds, butterflies, lilies of the valley; a mantelpiece of gaily-coloured majolica, with timepiece and candelabra of the same bright ware; a cottage piano, low and luxurious arm-chairs on each side of the fireplace, fern-cases and aquariums in the windows; tables and cabinets all bird's-eye maple, inlaid with various coloured woods.

It was a cheerless rainy day, a day that made the brightest things look dull, and Mr. Walgrave grew strangely silent while

his betrothed lingered in this gaily furnished chamber: it reminded him just a little of another room that had been gay with birds and flowers on a dark November day.

His betrothed was too much absorbed in the consideration of her rooms to perceive the sudden gloom upon his face. Miss Vallory was in excellent spirits; the upholsterer had executed her orders admirably. She felt a pleasure in the expenditure of her own money, a pride in this house of her own furnishing, which she had never felt in the splendours of Acropolis-square, and she was really fond of the man she was going to marry! really anxious that his position should be improved by these handsome surroundings, that her fortune should assist him in his professional career. That indifferentism of Mr. Walgrave's, which annoyed her somewhat at times, she took to be nothing more than manner, a merely conventional listlessness, of no more real significance than the fashion of his clothes, which he wore because other men wore them. It had never entered into her mind to doubt the reality of his affection for her. What could any man desire more in a wife than she could give—beauty, education, accomplishments, and fortune?

Mr. Walgrave assumed the name of Harcross early in the summer, but the marriage did not take place until term was over—a very brilliant marriage at a fashionable West-end church. Mr. and Mrs. Harcross went to the Highlands for their honeymoon, and contemplated the beauties of that illustrious land in a cool leisurely way that was peculiar to both of them. In November they came back to town, and began housekeeping in Mastodon-crescent, Hubert Harcross falling into the routine of his wife's existence with a sufficiently graceful submission. She did not demand quite so much of him as many women might have demanded in her position. She had made up her mind to be a woman of fashion, now that she had slipped her moorings as it were, and sailed out into the open sea. As Miss Vallory she had been only a rich solicitor's daughter, always fettered more or less by the narrow views of her father. As Mrs. Harcross, with a handsome fortune, and a husband on the high road to distinction, she felt her social position secure. The very best society, she told herself, would be open to her by and by, when her husband had made himself talked about. In the meanwhile she was content to be a person of importance in a somewhat lower circle, and to wait the hour when the doors of that higher paradise should be opened to her.

Thus the new life upon which Hubert Harcross entered was by no means a domestic life. It was rather a perpetual round of petty forms and ceremonies, which were almost as irksome to him as the routine of court life was to Madame de Maintenon, in those dreary years of her grandeur, when she languished, sick at heart,

for one half-hour of freedom. Mrs. Harcross liked to live "in society," which meant that all the best years of her life should be devoted to visiting, and receiving visitors. Her circle was always widening. People perpetually wanted to know her, and her weekly evening afforded an open field for the growth of new acquaintance. Hubert Harcross sickened of the simpering strange faces; the men who insisted in talking shop to him, and complimenting him on his admirable list of argument in this or that case; the amateur tenors and sopranos, who were always warbling by the grand piano; the last celebrity whom he was expected to worship. Man of the world as he was, he had his own notion of a home, which was something widely different—O, how widely!—from this splendid house in Mastodon-crescent, where the only room in which he felt himself his own master was that vault-like chamber looking on to a stony yard, and a high wall that shut out the sunshine. He submitted, however; allowed his wife to give as many dinners as she pleased, content to add his modest list of guests to her longer roll; went with her to as many parties as she pleased, sat out all the new plays produced at fashionable theatres, wasted an hour or two at the opera every subscription night, put in an appearance at private views at all the West-end picture galleries; and when his professional engagements permitted, would even submit to be paraded amongst the azaleas or rhododendrons at South Kensington or the Botanical.

He was not sorry, however, when his work grew heavier, and forbade these concessions on his part, until little by little he contrived to drop away in a great measure from his wife's amusements, pleading the exigencies of his profession. She would have liked much better to keep him by her side; but since she was bent upon his becoming a great man, she was fain to endure the loss of his society, and to go on her frivolous way, for the most part, without him, serene in the consciousness that she was the handsomest woman and the best-dressed woman in her circle; spending a thousand a year or so on her toilet and small personal requirements; and considering that she acquitted herself of all her duties to her God and her neighbour, when she put a sovereign in the plate handed round after a charity sermon, or subscribed five pounds to an orphanage or hospital.

The life was a barren life. They had been married more than two years, and no child had been born to them, to sanctify their union. No innocent baby face shone out star-like amidst the commonplace splendours of their home. That mutual source of interest and pleasure, which might have drawn husband and wife nearer together, was wanting. With a strange inconsistency, Hubert Harcross, whose whole career had been based upon a purely selfish philosophy, took this childlessness to heart, bitterly

disappointed, and thought of himself as he might have been with little children in his home, purified and elevated by that sacred trust.

He would rouse himself from gloomy brooding over this subject sometimes with a cynical laugh.

"Why should I languish for a son?" he would ask himself. "What have I to bequeath to him? a name without association but such cheap renown as I may win for it, the blood of a selfish spendthrift, and a past which is something worse than a blank. And when my children grew up, would not their clear eyes perceive what their mother may be too blind to discover, our cold and loveless union? Better as it is, perhaps; better that I should go childless to the grave, than I should live to see my children blush for me."

Mr. Harcross had in nowise overrated the value of his marriage with William Vallory's daughter and Stephen Harcross's heiress. His professional status had been very much improved by the fact of his private fortune. Perhaps there is no reputation in the world of more use to a man than a reputation for plenty of money. Mrs. Harcross's carriage, Mrs. Harcross's opera-box, Mrs. Harcross's evening parties, nay, even the pines and peaches on Mrs. Harcross's dinner-table in early May, brought Hubert Harcross more briefs than he could count. His clerk had learnt to decline retainers under a certain sum, and on one occasion, Mr. Harcross being at the Ryde villa with his wife, refused a fee of a hundred guineas, with daily refresher of twenty-five, on the ground that the weather was too hot for law, a refusal which was worth a thousand to him in reputation. The man who knows how to give himself airs at the right moment, is a man who knows how to succeed. Thus did Hubert Harcross prosper in the first years of his married life, and his name became a marked name, and solicitors in their agony besought his aid as a sure defence, a very tower of strength against the adversary. He was not a noisy advocate, not a florid rhetorical speaker. He had a good voice, which he rarely raised, a quiet level tone and manner, ever and anon relieved by some biting sarcasm that went home to the souls of his antagonists. He was a remarkably successful man, "lucky," people called him. To secure Harcross on a side was almost tantamount to securing a victory.

There were times when Mr. Harcross told himself that the life he led was all-sufficing for a man's happiness; that the one thing wanting in it was a very small thing, hardly worth thinking about. Often, seated at his dinner-table surrounded by pleasant faces, with the knowledge that he was admired, envied, liked perhaps by a few, it seemed to him that he must needs be happy; yet after this came the dark hour, the heart

that was cheerless in spite of its luxury, the oppressive sense of unsympathetic companionship, the miserable thought of what might have been, and what was.

Mrs. Harcross, for her part, was thoroughly satisfied. She had as much of her husband's society as his professional engagements permitted. She carried him at her chariot wheel almost wherever she pleased; her mode of life was his mode of life. If he was compelled to be at times a great deal away from her, she did not complain; she was not jealous, because nothing had ever occurred to awaken her jealousy, nor could she conceive it possible that any other woman could exercise the smallest influence on the heart of a man whom she had distinguished by her choice.

Although her husband was not always able to be her escort, she was very rarely without attendance. Weston Vallory was ever ready to waste his time in her service. He was one of those early risers, who contrive to get twice as much out of the day as their lazier fellow-men can obtain out of it, and he had generally accomplished a day's work before luncheon. That office of tame cat, which he had filled so well during Miss Vallory's girlhood, it was his honour and pleasure to retain in the household of Mrs. Harcross. Weston brought her the newest photographs for her portfolios; Weston hunted celebrities for her Thursday evenings; Weston helped her to select the guests for her dinners, to compose the *menu* even; in short, Weston had an infinite capacity for all those trivial things about which Hubert Harcross disdained to concern himself. He saw Weston Vallory dancing attendance upon his wife, and he was quite content that she should be so attended. It saved him a great deal of trouble, and Augusta was above suspicion. Mrs. Candour herself could hardly have hinted the possibility of a flirtation between the cousins.

In all their married life—not even when it had lasted for some years—had there been half-a-dozen hours of confidential talk between husband and wife. Of Hubert's childhood or youth, of his early manhood, its trials and temptations, Augusta knew nothing. She was not a person to be intensely interested in anything which had occurred before her own time; but she did once or twice express some curiosity upon the subject of her husband's antecedents.

"I don't think there ever was a wife who knew so little about her husband as I do, Hubert!" she said once, in a tone of complaint.

"Simply because there seldom is so little to know as in my case." Mr. Harcross replied coolly. "Some men have a history. I have none. My only antecedents are Rugby and Cambridge; my history, incessant hard work. I have worked hard; that is

the story of my life so far, my dear Augusta. If there are to be any strong incidents in the drama, the strong incidents are yet to come."

Mrs. Harcross had been married a year before she penetrated the privacy of those rooms in the Temple. One summer afternoon, when she had made an impromptu dinner-party for the same evening, and wanted to insure her husband's presence at the social board, she ordered her carriage and drove straight to the Temple. Cuppage the respectable ushered her at once into the barrister's room. Mr. Harcross was leaning over a standing-desk, turning the leaves of a brief with a weary air, and looked up with considerable surprise at the radiant vision of Mrs. Harcross sailing towards him with all her canvas spread.

"You here, Augusta! I should as soon have expected a call from the Princess of Teck, or any other great lady. Is there an earthquake, or anything of that kind, in the crescent?"

"I have asked some people to dinner, Hubert, and I wanted to make sure of your dining at home. What comfortable rooms! I thought everything in the Temple was dirty and horrid!"

"Not necessarily, my dear. We sometimes take the liberty to make ourselves comfortable. Will you have some pale sherry, or sherry-and-soda? I have my own particular cellar here, you know."

"You know I never take wine before dinner. What a life-like painting!" cried Mrs. Harcross, looking up at the picture over the fireplace. "It looks like a portrait. Rather a pretty face; but there's something about it I don't quite like."

"I am sorry for that, Augusta," Mr. Harcross answered quietly; "that picture is a portrait of my mother."

"Indeed! I beg your pardon; but you are always so reticent about your belongings, that I may be forgiven for not supposing the picture to be a family portrait. The face is very pretty, no doubt; but I cannot see any likeness to yourself."

"There is no such likeness. I have the honour to resemble my father and his ancestry."

"With what a sneer you say that! One would think your father must have been a very unpleasant person."

"I do not say that he was pleasant. My only knowledge of him is that he was a most consummate scoundrel, and that he did in some small measure reap the reward of his scoundrelism, which is not the fate of every scoundrel."

"O Hubert, how shocking it is to hear you speak like that!"

"An outrage of the conventionalities of life, is it not? I suppose every father ought to be a paragon in the opinion of his son. You see, Augusta, what little history I have is not

an agreeable one; it is better for both of us that I should avoid the subject, it always sets my teeth on edge."

"Just as you please. But why was Mrs. Walgrave painted in a fancy dress?"

"Because it was her fancy, I suppose, or perhaps a fashion in that remote age. I was not old enough to inquire into her reasons. The picture is an heirloom, and my only one."

Mrs. Harcross made a tour of the room, looking at the bookshelves, the mantelpiece, with its neat array of meerschaum pipes, cigar-cases, tobacco-jars, its skeleton clock, and thermometer in the shape of Cleopatra's Needle; the bright view from the windows, the commodious arm-chairs. She was hardly pleased to discover that her husband had a better room here than the gloomy chamber allotted to him in Mastodon-crescent.

She departed, however, without giving any expression to her feelings upon this subject; departed with her mind full of that picture over the mantelpiece.

CHAPTER XXII.

A PALPABLE HIT.

As the palace of the Sleeping Beauty awakened suddenly from a slumber and a stillness like unto death into the warm flush and vigour of life, so did Clevedon Hall cast off its torpor one bright summer day five years after Grace Redmayne's death, and begin to live again. Such a clatter of housemaids and scullions, such a hammering of carpenters and cabinet-makers, such a bustle and stir from garret to cellar, such digging and delving, and measuring and pruning, and mowing and gravel-spreading in the sleepy old gardens, such a dust and turmoil of bricklayers repairing the stables, such a barking of dogs and clamour of voices, scaring the solemn spirits of the surrounding woodland.

Sir Francis Clevedon was coming home. His aunt had died, leaving him her sole heir, and he was coming to live at Clevedon Hall with his sister as soon as the place could be made habitable. Mr. Wort came to and fro every day; spent the best part of his day walking about the hall and outbuildings, with a notebook in his hand and a pencil behind his ear, giving instructions and asking questions here, there, and everywhere. There were to be no costly improvements, only a general brushing up and repairing of the old house. To improve or restore such a

place as Clevedon Hall would have cost twenty thousand pounds, and with all the duties of a country gentleman to fulfil upon seven thousand a year, Francis Clevedon felt that he had no margin for such an outlay. Nor did he wish to see the place altered or renovated. He wanted to inhabit it as soon as it could be made habitable, and that any improvements to be made in it hereafter should be the growth of his own fancy, or his own necessities.

So the rats were driven from their commodious holes behind the old panelling, the spiders and cockchafers were swept out of their fastnesses in the elaborately carved cornices; an odour of paint, and varnish, and furniture polish pervaded the ancient mansion; staircases and floors were beeswaxed to a treacherous smoothness; the spiral balusters, the massive handrail, shone like the shell of a horse-chestnut just bursting from its green pod. New curtains were hung upon ancient bedsteads, new carpets laid down in the best rooms; a slight sprinkling of modern luxury in the way of cabinet work was introduced among the newer upholstery—the pseudo-classic gimcrackery of the Regency, and the heavy walnut-wood and oaken furniture that had been new in the days of Queen Anne. In some of the larger rooms the furniture was genuine Elizabethan stuff, and had been undisturbed since the house was first furnished; but these were the state apartments only; in the living rooms the upholstery had been altered freely to suit the taste of succeeding masters and mistresses, and the result was heterogeneous.

It was a fine old house, notwithstanding, noble with an old-world grandeur; a place to be entered with reverent footsteps, almost as one enters a church. And so thought Francis Clevedon as he entered it for the first time, in the sunny July noon-tide, with his sister Sibyl leaning on his arm, and John Wort at his side, flushed and excited, mopping his sunburnt countenance with a huge crimson silk handkerchief, and expounding his arrangements as he went along.

Sir Francis lingered for a minute or so on the topmost step of the broad stone flight that led up to the door of Clevedon Hall—lingered just long enough to take a cursory view of the park and woodland, and to be stared at by a few scattered groups of villagers, gamekeepers, farmers' lads, and the like, who had assembled to witness his arrival, and to cheer him with clamorous welcome as he stepped out of the carriage that had brought him from Tunbridge.

What did they see for their pains? A tall, well-built young man, with a dark complexion, regular features, and bright gray eyes—an animated handsome young fellow, with flashing white teeth, and a frank friendly smile. The girl beside him was unlike him in every respect—small and fair, and delicate-looking:

pretty, with the fragile prettiness of Dresden china. He was a Clevedon to the backbone, said the friends of the family; and poor dear Sibyl was only a Wilder.

"I am really very much obliged to you," he said to the Kentish peasantry, with an amused smile, thinking how the whole thing seemed like a scene out of an opera—he the young Count or Baron, these his faithful subjects; "but I don't feel that I have done anything to deserve your kindness. By and by, perhaps, if you find me a good landlord, or a good master, or a good neighbour, as the case may be, I may have a better claim to such a friendly reception. I don't know whether there is such a thing as a barrel of beer in our cellars, but if there is, it shall be broached immediately."

"We had a waggon-load down from Blackfriars yesterday," said Mr. Wort; "I'll send them out a cask, if you like."

"By all means. And now, Sibyl, what do you think of Clevedon?"

"It is lovelier than I ever made it in my dreams," the girl answered in a low voice. It was such an old dream, this coming to Clevedon, and the realisation of it well-nigh overcame her. "If mamma had only been with us!" she said regretfully.

"Ah, yes, Sibyl. That takes the sunshine out of it," answered her brother; and then the two walked silently through the hall, and that silence, that sudden pause in their delight, was a kind of homage to the dead. Mr. Wort mopped his forehead, and then, too impatient to wait for questioning, broke out at once with his explanations.

"I kept as close as I could to the letter of your directions, Sir Francis," he said in his rapid business-like way; "but I have been obliged to exceed my instructions in some small matters: the curtains in the yellow drawing-room, for instance—George the Fourth's drawing-room, as it was christened in Sir Lucas's time—were really shameful, not a bit of colour left in 'em, and as rotten as a bell pear. I have taken the liberty to order crimson reps. It looks comfortable, to say the least of it, and contrasts with the cream-and-gold paper—that we leave; it cost three-and-sixpence a yard, and the gilding is almost as fresh as when it was first put up. I have taken the liberty also to introduce a new bedstead into Miss Clevedon's room—a brass Arabian; likewise chintz hangings in bedroom, dressing-room, and morning-room, which are all *on sweet*."

"I am sure you are very good, Mr. Wort," Miss Clevedon replied, smiling. "I never could have slept in one of those queer old beds with plumes of crimson feathers at the top of the posts. Thank you very much for my brass Arabian. You seem to have arranged everything nicely."

"I have done my best, you see, miss; but it was all guess-

work. I tried as hard as I could to keep close to my orders, and do no more than make the place wind and weather tight, and clean and comfortable."

"You have made it charming. O, what a darling room, and what delicious old windows, and what a view! We ought to be very happy here, Francis, after those tiresome dull old German towns. I hope we have nice neighbours, Mr. Wort?"

Mr. Wort was by no means enthusiastic on this point.

"There's three or four nice places round about," he said; "but as to the people, there's not much use in counting upon them. Nobody worth speaking of seems to stay at home nowadays; they're off to London for the season, or they're off to Scotland grouse-shooting and deer-stalking, or they're on the Continent, or they're fishing in Norway, while the hares and rabbits are eating up the profits of their tenants' farms, and the trout in their own streams are being swallowed whole by the jack. I've no patience with such people."

"I don't mean to be an absentee, Mr. Wort," Sir Francis replied gaily; "but we must find some nice neighbours. If we don't, Sibyl will have the blues, and go wandering about the old place some day till she finds an old woman spinning, and sticks a spindle through her hand, like the Sleeping Beauty. I dare say there is an old woman spinning in one of those pepper-box turrets. We really must find some neighbours."

"There's plenty of villers," growled Mr. Wort, "Tunbridge way. But they'd hardly be your sort. They go up to the City every day."

"I would not mind even that, if the villas were a good sort of fellows. I should prefer Burke's landed gentry, of course, because they'd put me in the way of playing squire, as I mean to perform the character—the genuine fine-old-English-gentleman kind of thing—if I can. I have got one letter of introduction, by the way, to a Colonel Davenant, the Bungalow, Tunbridge Wells. Do you know anything about him?"

"I've heard tell of the party," Mr. Wort answered dubiously; "an elderly gentleman that's been a good deal in the East Indies, and keeps a sight of monkeys."

"Monkeys!" cried Sir Francis and his sister simultaneously.

"Yes, miss—and worse than monkeys. I have seen the old gentleman on the Pantiles with a beast something like a ferret on his shoulder—a mungoose, I've heard them call it—and he pampering and petting of it as if it had been an infant."

"Rather eccentric, certainly," said Sir Francis, laughing. "But I am told the Colonel is a capital fellow. Is there nothing more agreeable than monkeys in his household? I want to find some pleasant companions for my sister. Has he a wife and daughters as well as the mungoose?"

"There is a daughter, but she's wrapped up in monkeys; or if it isn't monkeys, it's dogs. The Colonel's place is a regular Zoological Gardens."

Sir Francis and his sister laughed; and Mr. Wort having pointed out his improvements, departed, to set the barrel of ale going on the lawn before the house, much to the satisfaction of the curious villagers who had interested themselves in the baronet's arrival. The steward being thus got rid of, the brother and sister rambled gaily about the old house, admiring this and exclaiming at that, and forming all kinds of pleasant schemes for their new life, until it was time to dress for dinner, when Miss Clevedon retired to her apartments, and Sir Francis to his—about a quarter of a mile apart.

They dined in state in James the First's dining-room, with three men in attendance. Old Tristram Mole had been pensioned off, and now occupied the principal lodge. The new men had been engaged by Mr. Wort, and were accomplished in their respective walks.

"I should like you to arrange that square parlour on the right of the hall for a secondary dining-room, Jordan, when Miss Clevedon and I are alone," Sir Francis said to the butler, at the close of the banquet.

"I'm so glad you told him that, Frank," Sibyl said, when the men had gone. "I feel as if I had been dining in a church, or in one of those great hotel dining-rooms abroad, with the table-d'hôte all to ourselves."

They grew quite at home in the old house, however, in a very few days, and Sibyl went singing up and down the long corridors in her clear soprano, like a joyous bird, only thinking now and then that there might be ghosts, and that she might come suddenly upon one in a dusky corner.

"I don't think I should much mind a genuine old-established ghost," she told her brother; "a lady in a sacque, or a Charles-the-Second cavalier, or some one of that kind. Collis was quite afraid the first night we slept here, and insisted upon sleeping with one of the housemaids, instead of in the nice little room they had arranged for her; but I told her next morning that a young woman who did not like ghosts should never take a situation in a good old family like ours. 'Of course we have a family ghost,' I said; 'we have as much right to that as to the genealogical tree in the hall. Depend upon it, Collis, those great bucket boots that hang in the lobby come down at twelve o'clock every night, and tramp, tramp, tramp along all the passages. You'll meet them face to face some night, if you sit up reading novels as you so often do; and I wouldn't answer for that man in armour, or that suit of armour without any man, at the foot of the staircase. *He* looks as if he walked.' 'I suppose you're

only joking, miss,' Collis answered, as grave as a judge; 'but all I know is, that the rooms and passages upstairs—on *our* floor—smell of ghosts.' 'Mice, you mean, Collis.' 'Lor, no, miss; as if I didn't know the difference between the smell of a mouse and a ghost!'"

Of course all the county people who happened to be at home at this time came to call on Sir Francis and Miss Clevedon, and were duly charmed with the baronet and his sister. There seemed to be no lack of agreeable neighbours, without counting the objectionable villas about Tunbridge, which went daily to business in the City. Colonel Davenant, perhaps not esteeming himself on a level with county persons, or perhaps too much wrapped up in monkeys for the performance of small social duties, did not come. So one bright afternoon in August, Sir Francis rode over to the Wells to deliver his letter of introduction. The letter had been written by one of his most intimate friends, who had given him a glowing account of the old Indian officer.

Colonel Davenant's place was known as the Bungalow. It had begun its existence as a villa, with some pretensions to the gothic; but having fallen into the hands of the Colonel, whose inventive mind was apt to exercise itself on everything within its range, had been barbarised and orientalised out of all architectural character by divers enlargements and improvements, all evolved from the inner consciousness of that gentleman, in utter defiance of all rules and conventions of the building art. A huge verandah jutting out from a very small drawing-room; a domed conservatory—after the model of a mosque at Delhi—overtopping the dining-room; a Pompeian court and fountain behind the kitchen, where the Colonel could sit on a carpet smoking his hookah, and discussing the arrangement of his tiffin, or his dinner, with that faithful slave his cook; the Sister-Anne turret—a campanello tower, whence the Colonel could survey valley, common, hill, and woodland: these were among the trifling eccentricities of the Bungalow. The effect was curious but not unpleasant. The house was rich and gay with Indian spoil—monster jars and curious carved furniture in Bombay black-wood, gorgeous silken stuffs and ivory temples; and in all the rooms there were birds and flowers, and living animals reclining on the skins of dead animals; a yapping of small dogs and twittering of songless Australian birds, and a squalling of parrots.

The afternoon was exceptionally warm, and the Colonel was enjoying a siesta by the side of his fountain. Thither a neat parlour-maid ushered the stranger, through the garden, and by a somewhat circuitous path meandering through a shrubbery of laurel and bay and monkey trees and castor-oil plants, which the Colonel called his jungle.

Sir Francis did not emerge from the jungle without a small adventure. In one of the windings of the narrow path he met a young lady who reminded him of Robinson Crusoe. A young lady who carried a green silk umbrella of foreign manufacture, and upon whose shoulder there perched a small Java monkey, and about whose footsteps there crowded some half-dozen dogs and doglings—from a lank half-grown Scotch deerhound to a coffee-coloured black-muzzled pug.

Francis Clevedon only caught one transient glimpse of the face under the green umbrella—a bright girlish face, with Irish gray eyes, and a sweet smiling mouth. He had just time to see this, and that Miss Crusoe was tall and slim, and carried herself with the air of a princess. She acknowledged Sir Francis's bow with a gracious movement of her pretty head, and passed lightly on, while the monkey looked back to hiss and spit at the stranger in an alarmingly vixenish way.

"Miss Davenant, I suppose?" Francis inquired of the servant.

"Yes, sir, that's our young lady. I hope you'll excuse the monkey, sir; he doesn't mean any harm, but he's jealous of strangers."

They came to a little green arcade, and through this into the Pompeian court, where the Colonel sat on his musnud, with his back against the marble rim of the basin, snoring audibly. He woke up with a start as the maid announced Sir Francis Clevedon, swore a prayer or two, or perhaps something the reverse of a prayer, and then rose to receive his guest in a hearty soldier-like fashion.

"Take the arm-chair, Sir Francis, and if you like a hookah, there's one ready to your hand on that table. Heartily glad to see any friend of Sinclair's—congratulate you on taking possession of Clevedon. Fine old place, noble old place, plenty of good shootin', and one of the best trout streams in the county. Sinclair wrote me word of your return, and I meant to have come over to call before this, but this weather tries an old man, sir. I feel the heat more here than ever I did in Bengal. I'll turn on the fountain, by the bye; I daresay you like the sound of a fountain;" and thereupon the Colonel applied himself to some complicated arrangement of screws and cranks which seemed to involve a good deal of hard labour, and threatened to put the gallant officer into a profuse perspiration.

"Pray don't trouble yourself on my account," remonstrated Sir Francis. "I find your room most delightfully cool, even without the fountain."

"Do you?" cried the Colonel, gratified, and smiling in the midst of his struggles with a very stiff screw. "Built it myself after my own design; laid every brick with my own hand, one bricklayer's labourer, and an odd boy to hold the ladder. There's a settlement in that corner, but it won't go any farther.

But we'll have the fountain. I like to take it out of the water-company, because they won't let me pay by meter. Made the fountain myself from a plan which a fool of a plumber told me was opposed to every principle of engineering; but it works, you see, in spite of the beggar," concluded the Colonel triumphantly, as the water shot up with an explosive sound like a small Niagara, then flew off at a tangent, liberally besprinkling Sir Francis, and at last composed itself into a quirk, quirk, guggle, guggle, guggle, quirk, of the meekest description.

The two gentlemen began their acquaintance by talking of that excellent fellow their common friend, Major Sinclair, by whose side the Colonel had fought in the Punjab, and whom Sir Francis had met at Brussels, settled for life in one of the white houses on the boulevard, with a wife and half-a-dozen children, all talking broad Scotch, and arrayed to the teeth in *tar'an* and Shetland wool. After this absent friend, his excellence of heart, and his various idiosyncrasies had been duly discussed, the Colonel entertained Sir Francis with an anecdote or two from his personal experience, not occupying much more than half an hour, which in the Colonel was brevity, and after the anecdotes Sir Francis's host volunteered to show him the Bungalow.

"It was a square box of a place when I bought it," he said; "a man might as well live in a packing-case; but I flatter myself I've imparted a good deal of character to it. I like a house to reflect the individuality of the owner. To my mind, a man could hardly enter my hall-door without saying to himself, Anglo-Indian! old soldier!"

Sir Francis wondered where the hall-door might be, and whether the house was only accessible by the meandering paths of the jungle and the Pompeian court adjoining the kitchen.

"By the way, you'll dine with us to-day, of course?"

Sir Francis hesitated; Sibyl would wait dinner for him.

"No, thanks. I should be delighted, but my sister is living with me, and she'll expect me home to dinner."

"Never mind that. She'll wait half an hour, and then give you up. Or I could send a boy on a pony, if you like. Women never care much about dinner. The wide distance between the mental capacities of the two sexes is firmly established by that one fact; a woman's intellect is incapable of a broad and philosophical comprehension of the dinner-question. She is the slave of conventionality, and has no more culinary invention than an Abyssinian. Halloo, Japson, what are you going to give us for dinner to-day?"

At this appeal, a stout rosy-faced matron looked out of a window bordered with a vine which the Colonel had coaxed to grow in his peristyle, a matron whose ruddy visage was obscured by a floury dust, as the rising moon by some fleecy cloud.

"Lor, sir, you give the horder yourself, this morning."

"True, Japson, but memory is sometimes treacherous. This gentleman is going to dine with me——"

"But really——" protested Sir Francis.

"My dear sir, it is a settled thing. The boy goes on a porv with an apologetic message to Miss Clevedon. Now, Japson, be categorical. Imprimis, red mullet stewed in Madeira."

"Yes, sir."

"Soup I abjure in summer, Sir Francis, as a sloppy conventionality which distracts a cook's attention from her fish. Potage à la reine thickened with pounded almonds is not a bad thing, and good green-pea soup is palatable. I let Japson make those when she is in a good temper, and can answer for the smoothness of the purée. After the mullet a prawn curry—eh, Japson?"

"Yes, sir," answered the cook, grinning.

"Don't forget the grated cocoa-nut. After the curry?"

"A stewed fowl."

"In half mourning; that is to say, in a white sauce with truffles. Be liberal with your truffles, Japson; killed the fatted calf for my friend, Sir Francis Clevedon. Any grouse?"

"Yes, sir; the brace you sent in this morning."

"To be sure, prime young birds. I always stroll to the Wells before breakfast, and select my own comestibles, Sir Francis. Those scoundrels the tradesmen know me, and would hang themselves sooner than send me an inferior article. Be careful of your bread-crumbs, Japson; and you may give us an apricot omelette, and a parmesan soufflé. Now, Sir Francis?"

"If I really am to have the honour of dining with you to-day, Colonel, I may as well send my groom back with the horses and a message for my sister," said Francis, with a very vivid recollection of the face under the green umbrella, and a somewhat frivolous desire to improve his acquaintance with Miss Crusoe.

"By all means. I'll show you my garden, and we'll go round to the stable and hunt up your man."

The garden was as eccentric as the house, and arranged for the pleasure and accommodation of the animal creation rather than for the diversion of their masters. There was a grotto, or cave of rock-work overarched by a pool, in which a tame otter flopped about to the infinite delight of the Colonel, who loitered a minute or so to feed the beast with fragments of biscuit from the pocket of his Cashmere morning coat. There were cages of birds, artfully placed among the ornamental timber, with a view to cheating those feathered creatures into the belief that they were the denizens of a primeval forest; there were miniature classic temples, and mediæval fortresses, one with a bristling row of wine-bottles, neck outwards, to represent cannon, inhabited by

various dogs, which sprang out to caress the Colonel as he passed. There was a portable Chinese pagoda, hung with bells, for the occupation of the Java monkey.

The stables were at the side of the house, and here the Colonel's eccentricity had exhibited itself in the conversion of a hay-loft into a billiard-room, accessible only by an external staircase in the Alpine chalet style. He kept a couple of saddle-horses for himself and his daughter, a pony and a basket-chaise (which he called his palki); and his stable-yard was for the most part occupied by a pheasantry. Here they found the groom looking at the pheasants. His master dispatched him with a message for Miss Clevedon, and this being done, was free to accompany the Colonel over the Bungalow, and to listen to that officer's somewhat prolix histories of various curios and other trophies which adorned the rooms.

Sir Francis was beginning to think they would never arrive at the apartment inhabited by Miss Crusoe, when Colonel Davenant opened an unexpected door in about as inconvenient a corner as a door could be placed, and introduced his guest into the drawing-room a small low room with a wide window running along one side of it, and opening into a substantially-built verandah, larger and loftier than the apartment itself, and paved with variously-coloured tiles. The room proper held only a piano, a few easy-chairs, and a coffee-table or two; but the verandah, or annex, was large enough to accommodate plenty of chairs and ottomans, on one of which a young lady was seated, dressed in white muslin, reading a novel, with a couple of dogs at her feet.

This was Miss Crusoe, who put down her book and rose to greet her father with a charming smile—a smile which she extended in a modified degree to Sir Francis Clevedon upon his being presented to her. Seeing her for the first time unshadowed by the umbrella, Sir Francis decided that Miss Davenant was even prettier than he had supposed. The bright piquant face, with its gray eyes and dark lashes; the rippling brown hair, brushed loosely back from a broad white forehead, and breaking into mutinous curls here and there; the slim swan-like throat, and the lofty carriage of the head, seemed to him perfectly beautiful. He made a kind of breakneck plunge into some rather commonplace observations about the Bungalow, the Bungalow gardens, and the Bungalow zoological collection; but felt himself less at his ease than usual; and was relieved presently to find himself seated upon an ottoman, making friends with the youthful deerhound, who was of a gregarious temper, and getting on very tolerably with Miss Davenant.

Georgie her father called her. What a pretty name, and one that suited her admirably! thought Sir Francis. She had a somewhat boyish frankness of manner, not harsh, or coarse, or

masculine, but certainly boyish: the gracious ease of a well-bred Etonian. She had never been at a boarding-school, or even under the milder sway of a governess at home; she had grown up like one of the flowering plants that took their own way in the Colonel's jungle; masters had come to the Bungalow on certain days to teach her their several arts, and for the rest, her father had educated her—or not educated her—as the case might be.

Sir Francis stayed to dinner, and stayed till eleven o'clock that night, by which hour he and Miss Davenant seemed to have known each other quite a long time. The Colonel told a few longish stories of Indian warfare, gave a slight sketch of Lieutenant-general Davenant's (his father's) career in the Peninsula, which lasted an hour or so, and otherwise beguiled the evening with agreeable converse. Sir Francis was of course attentive to those narrations, but he contrived between whiles to find out a good deal about Georgie's tastes and habits: when she rode, where she rode, whether she competed for prizes at local flower-shows, or visited the poor, or devoted herself exclusively to the brute creation.

He found that she did a little of everything, except exhibiting any specimens of her horticultural skill at the flower-shows.

"I give the prizes sometimes at the cottage flower-shows," she said, "but things don't grow in our greenhouse quite as well as they might. Sometimes Tufto scratches them up—you know very well you do, you wicked Tufto!"—shaking her head at the deerhound—"or Pedro—the monkey, you know—knocks over the pots with his tail. Grant, our gardener, is quite unhappy about it; but the fact is, flowers and animals do not get on very well together."

"My sister has a passion for flowers; goes in tremendously for ferns, and that kind of thing; and has stuffed her poor little head as full of their names as if she was a perambulating botanical dictionary. She has just begun building a fern-house, which is to be all dark green glass, and she means to do wonders in that line. I hope you and she will be good friends."

"I have no doubt I shall like her very much."

"Will you call upon her, or shall she come to you?"

"Just as she pleases. I am not at all particular about forms and ceremonies."

"She shall come to-morrow, then, although you are the oldest inhabitant."

"Thanks. I shall be so pleased to see her. Is she fond of animals?"

"I hardly know. I think I ought to answer as the man did who was asked if he could play the fiddle. He didn't know, as he had never tried. Sibyl has not had any opportunity of developing her taste for the brute species. She only finished her

education a year or so ago, at a convent in Bruges; and since then she has been travelling with me. But I daresay she has a latent taste for dogs and monkeys."

"I don't think she can help liking Pedro," Miss Davenant replied naïvely, with an affectionate glance towards the warmest corner of the little drawing-room, where that luxurious animal, the Java monkey, was coiled up on a sheepskin rug.

Sir Francis rode homeward by moonlight, very well pleased with the eccentricities of the Bungalow.

"Sinclair was right," he said to himself. "The Colonel is a capital fellow. I wish his stories of the Punjab and the Peninsula were a trifle shorter. But that's a detail. What a lovely face it is! Georgie—Georgie—Georgie Davenant!" The name repeated itself over and over again, in time with the tramp of his horse's hoofs, like an old rhyme.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"FOR LIFE, FOR DEATH."

MISS CLEVEDON drove over to the Bungalow on the following afternoon. She was one of those nice easy-tempered girls who are always ready to cultivate any one their brothers may happen to admire; not a girl to place stumbling-blocks across a brother's path to matrimony, from any selfish desire to preserve to herself the advantages of his bachelorhood. It was very nice to reign over such a mansion as Clevedon Hall; but Sibyl had no genius for housekeeping, and she felt that as a country squire it was Francis's bounden duty to take unto himself a wife.

At breakfast Francis was full of his dinner at the Bungalow: the fountain; the cook looking out of the window, all the ins and outs, and ups and downs, of the house, improved by the Colonel's architectural fancies; the zoological collection; the old soldier himself, with his long stories and vehement epithets; and finally Miss Davenant.

"Is she pretty?" Sibyl asked curiously.

"I think her remarkably pretty. I don't know whether she has a classical profile, a Grecian nose coming straight down from her forehead, or anything of that kind; in fact, I rather think her nose has a slight upward tendency; or it may be the way she holds her head—as high as if she were a princess of the blood royal. In short, you see, Sibyl, I can't positively say whether she is regularly beautiful; but if you take into consideration her eyes—which are splendid—and her expression, and vivacity, and a kind of *je ne sais quoi*-ishness, you cannot fail to admit that she is a lovely girl."

"Good gracious, Francis, what a confused description: splendid eyes, and a turned-up nose, and her head stuck up in a conceited way!"

"No, Sibyl, I didn't say in a conceited way. She has no more conceit than patient Grizzle."

"Bother patient Grizzle!" Miss Clevedon exclaimed contemptuously: "I never had any patience with that ridiculous creature. Of course a man wrote the story—it was like him to do it, just to show what foolish sheep-like beings *you* would like us to be,—and it never was true. Does she dress well?"

"Patient Grizzle?"

"No, sir. This paragon of yours, who isn't pretty, and yet is."

"I really can't venture to express my opinion on such an important question as that. She had a white gown and a green umbrella, and looked nice."

"A white gown and a green umbrella! what an absurd young woman! I don't wonder Mr. Wort turned up his nose at these Davenants."

"Now, there's no use in trying to be disagreeable, Sibyl; it isn't your *métier*. Miss Davenant is a charming girl, and I'm sure you'll like her as much as——"

"As much as what, sir?"

"As much as I do."

"What, Francis, again?"

This "again" had relation to certain passages in Sir Francis's past life. He had not reached his twenty-seventh year without falling in love a few times on the way; he had, indeed, been in and out of love, as a rule, about once in a twelvemonth; and his sister, in whom he had been wont to confide, had no profound faith in the constancy of his fancies. A man who has a fair estate, the world all before him, and no particular occupation, is apt to be rather hard hit by any pretty face that may flit across his pathway.

"I think you ought to plead like those grotto-boys who besieged our carriage in London the other day, Francis, 'It's only once a year.' Pray is Miss Davenant prettier than Euphrasie Lamont, the Spanish-looking beauty you fell in love with at the convent?"

"What! that little tawny dwarfish thing?"

"O, Francis! you raved about her."

"Did I? She was well enough, I daresay, for a little one; out this girl is as tall as—Helen of Troy."

"How do you know that Helen was tall?"

"Tennyson says so—

" 'divinely tall,
And most divinely fair.' "

O, I'm sure of it. Of course Helen was tall; you can't fancy Clytemnestra a little woman; they were sisters, you know."

"What a horrid family!"

"Well, yes, they were rather a queer lot, answering to some of our English nobility—a taint in the blood, I suppose. I think I remember that little Lamont girl had fine eyes, but such a duodecimo-ish creature. Lady Clevedon must be tall."

"Lady Clevedon! Has it come to that?"

"It has come to nothing, except—another cup of tea, if you please. You are going to call upon Miss Davenant, and see the zoological collection this afternoon."

"But oughtn't she to call upon me first?"

"I don't know anything about the oughts of the case. But you are going this afternoon—I told her so."

Miss Clevedon submitted with a pretty little grimace, and drove off to the Bungalow directly after luncheon, enjoying not a little the novel splendour of her barouche and two men-servants.

The visit was altogether a success. Sibyl admired all the eccentricities of house and garden, and the two girls were delighted with each other, swearing an undying friendship on the spot, as it were. After this call the Colonel and his daughter rode over to the Hall one morning; whereby Sir Francis had the opportunity of seeing Georgina Davenant in her habit, which became her above any other garment, and also of showing the old house and grounds to his new friends, the inventive Colonel suggesting an alteration in every room they entered.

"Invention—construction, perhaps I should say, is my forte, sir," he said. "If this house were mine, I'd make it the finest in England."

"But it is so already, papa—one of the finest, I should think," replied Georgie.

"Undoubtedly, my dear; but its capabilities of improvement are enormous. That oriel window over the hall-door, for instance. Very fine, no doubt; but why not have oriel windows along the whole range of your front, instead of these flat things? Then there's the groined roof in the dining-hall, sombre to the last degree; cut away all that antiquated woodwork, and paint your ceiling blue, picked out with gold stars. Then you have those open colonnades yonder; a mere waste of space; fill them in with violet-coloured plate-glass, and make one a smoking-divan and the other a billiard-room. That's what I call bringing modern enlightenment to bear upon Elizabethan incapacity."

"I think I prefer Elizabethan shortcomings to Victorian improvements, Colonel," Sir Francis observed, smiling. "I should hardly care to change the character of the place."

"Prejudice, my good sir; the English mind all over. Your true-born Englishman will go on enduring any amount of incor-

venience rather than infringe a set of arbitrary rules made by some dunderheaded architect. Character, indeed! Where's the character in my house? Yet I think you'll admit it's comfortable."

"I most freely admit that it is a delightful house," said Sir Francis, with a little stolen glance at Georgie.

"Of course everybody admits that it's comfortable; but you should have heard the opposition I had to encounter from officious asses who call themselves my friends while I was building. 'You mustn't have your kitchen in the middle of your house,' says one; 'you'll smell your dinner!' 'And I like to smell my dinner,' I told the blockhead; 'I like to know what I'm going to have, and to prepare my mind for it.' 'You can't have one bedroom upon one level, and another bedroom upon another level,' remarked an officious idiot. 'Can't I?' said I; 'I'll show you whether I can or not. If I want my dining-room loftier than my drawing-room, it shall be loftier; and I'll have every one of my bedrooms upon different levels, to spite you.' 'You mustn't have one side of your house higher than another,' said that prince of fools, the builder's foreman; 'for if you do, your chimneys will smoke.' 'Then my chimneys shall smoke,' said I; and they do—when the wind's in the west; but I've got a German stove or two to remedy that; and I've had my own way."

After this came many interchanges of civility between Clevedon Hall and the Bungalow. Sir Francis organised drives and excursions to various points of attraction in the picturesque line, in which the Colonel and his daughter consented to join, with pleasant returns in the sunset to the Hall or the Bungalow for a half-past eight-o'clock dinner. The two girls, Sibyl and Georgie, were sworn friends; English country-house life was new to Miss Clevedon, and Miss Davenant was able to advise and enlighten her upon many questions. She wanted to do some small amount of good among the poor round Clevedon; and Georgie, who with her dogs was a familiar visitor in many humble households about the Wells, and had a wonderful knack for getting on with poor people, volunteered to set her in the way of being useful.

If Sibyl began by protesting against Francis's subjugation, she ended by almost worshipping the girl he admired. There was no such thing as opposition, therefore, to whet the keen edge of Sir Francis's passion. The course of this, his latest, love ran on velvet, and little by little the fact came home to him that this last-born passion was something serious. He had been doubtful of himself at first, remembering those former episodes in his life, and how he had more than once seemed to be very far gone. But no, this was the real thing; he had admired a good many

pretty women in his time, but mind, heart, and soul had never been held in bondage as they were now by Georgie Davenant. The bright frank face, with its innocent young beauty, the proud generous nature which unconsciously revealed itself in trifles, what more need he desire in the woman who was to share and brighten his existence? He watched Sibyl and Georgie's growing affection for each other with delight. His only sister was very dear to him, and it would have distressed him if his choice of a wife had brought about any lessening of the bond between them. It would have seemed a hard thing to him if he had brought a wife home to Clevedon Hall who would have made the place anything less than a home to his sister.

He looked back upon those bygone flirtations as so many glorious escapes. What if he had flung himself away matrimonially upon one of those fallen idols, and come home to Clevedon bound by the fetters of an injudicious marriage—come home to behold his "fate" in Georgie Davenant? "She would have been fatal to me, let me meet her when I might," he said to himself. O, the anguish of meeting that radiant creature too late!

For a man so completely his own master, the process of wooing is apt to go swiftly. There was no ground for hesitation or delay; and before these two young people had known each other a fortnight, it might have been tolerably clear to the eye of a competent observer, that the admiration was mutual. In their confidential discourse, Sibyl now and then ventured on a leading question, and had contrived thus to discover the state of her friend's affections. Georgie was not engaged, that she admitted without hesitation.

"I am so glad, dear," cried Sibyl.

"But why?" Miss Davenant inquired, blushing a little.

"O, I really can scarcely say why. But I am glad. An engaged girl is always so taken up with her lover, and never seems to think of anything except what she is going to do after she is married; in short, an engaged girl is hardly any good for a friend. And I like you so much, darling, and want to have you all to myself."

Miss Clevedon, whose conventual education and foreign life had given her few opportunities of learning the equestrian art, was glad to ride with Georgie Davenant, who was as peerless in the saddle as Di Vernon, and as good a whip as if she had been a member of the house of Nero. Under this gentle guidance, also, Sibyl learnt to drive a pair of rather spirited brown cobs, without feeling in mortal terror and blind uncertainty as to what the cobs might take it into their heads to do. They were very happy together, and the two bright girlish faces grew to be welcome in the pretty cottages round Clevedon, a part of Kent

in which the rustic population is lodged with a certain luxury of architecture, dainty gothic cottages, with a neat half-acre of garden and orchard, dotting the well-kept high-roads here and there.

So things went on their smooth course, as things do go now and then for the favoured ones of this world, until one bright October morning, towards the end of the month, when he had known her more than ten weeks—an age of hope and happiness—Sir Francis, beguiling his idle morning with a gallop in Felsted Wood, overtook Miss Davenant, who happened to have ridden that way for her daily airing, on her gray Arab Selim, attended by the most discreet of grooms, a gray-moustached old lancer, whom the Colonel had taken from his own regiment.

The syce, as the Colonel insisted on calling him, fell back out of earshot as Sir Francis accosted his young mistress, and the lovers rode on side by side, over the fallen fir-cones, through the spicy atmosphere, radiant with youth and hope, like Lancelot and Guinivere.

It was the old, old story, told in the frankest, manliest words that ever came straight from the heart of a speaker. They rode out of the pine-wood plighted to each other, "for life, for death."

CHAPTER XXIV.

GEORGIE'S SETTLEMENT.

THE Colonel was delighted. Of course he had seen, from an early stage, which way matters were drifting; and he had suffered them to drift, without interference or hindrance from him, proving himself the very wisest of match-makers by that judicious quiescence. He had lived his own life, consuming much *tsatakia*, or mild Turkish, in his atrium; conversing with his cook; scheming various alterations and improvements in the Bungalow; educating Pedro, the monkey, in those polite arts which make a monkey a gentleman; and otherwise enjoying himself in the serenest manner; always ready to join the young people in any excursion or party they might choose to plan, and beaming upon them with a countenance which was as the very spiritual light and sunshine of a jovial mind.

When that solemn question came to be asked, which is somewhat awful for the briefless barrister or the fledgling curate, but easy enough for a man with a landed estate, and seven thousand per annum in shares, debentures, consols, Egyptian bonds, and so on, the Colonel behaved with an airy grace that was charming

"My dear fellow, if I must part with my little girl—and I needn't say that it's a hard thing for a man in my position to do it—my only tie to life, sir, except the mungoose; if I must part with Georgie, I'd rather it should be to you than to any one else. First and foremost, you're a — good fellow, and I've a — respect for you. Secondly, my little girl will be near me. You're not like those fellows in the service, who have come proposing for her, coolly informing me that as there was every prospect of their regiment being ordered off to Japan, or Cochin-China, or Timbuctoo, as the case might be, early in the spring, they would like the wedding to come off soon, if I pleased. I did not please, and, luckily for me, Georgie didn't please either; for a tear or two from her would have knocked me over at once."

Thus, and in many more words, with the mungoose prom-nading about his capacious chest and shoulders the while, did the Colonel give his consent. Then came a little talk about settlements; Francis eager to lavish the chief part of his wealth on his betrothed, the Colonel protesting against that quixotic generosity.

"We will do what is right, sir, and no more. I'm not a man of business myself; but we'll put ourselves in the hands of some conscientious fellow who is a man of business, and he shall decide what is fair and equitable in the case. Rolling-stone as I have been, I have not gone through life without gathering some small amount of moss. I can give my girl a few thousands, and at my death she will inherit—" the Colonel paused, and seemed to swell with importance at this point—"THE BUNGALOW! I think, although it may not suit her convenience to occupy it, my child will value the work of her old father's hands when he is under the turf. She will take care that the roof is kept in repair, and that the fountain works daily."

The marriage was not to take place until early in the following spring. Francis would fain have had it sooner; but the Colonel and Georgie both declared that even this interval would make a very brief engagement.

"You can know so little of me," she said to her lover. "How can I feel sure that I am really the sort of person you think me? Suppose, when we are married, you should find that you have made quite a mistake after all. Wouldn't *that* be dreadful! Sibyl tells me you were in love ever so many times abroad, and that you always ended by finding out that the young lady didn't suit you in the least. How can I tell that you may not find out the same thing about me?"

"My darling, I have known and loved you from the first time I saw you, and I never loved any one before in my life."

"O, Frank! after all Sibyl has told me——"

"Sibyl's statements are true and false, dear. I have had a

sort of a—kind of a—predilection for two or three young women in the course of my life; have, perhaps, flirted—I suppose you would call it, and have even gone so far as to fancy myself in love; but from the moment I loved you I knew that those other affairs were the merest fancies. In short, I have had a series of escapes, Georgie, and my fate has always been waiting for me here and if it comes to any examination of antecedents, Miss Davenant, I shall be glad to receive some information about that Captain Bangle, who wanted you to accompany him to Timbuctoo, and Major Hawkins, who was anxious to export you to Japan.”

“O, Frank! I never gave either of them the faintest encouragement. They were friends of papa’s, and used to dine with us very often, and were always extremely polite, asking me to sing and play, and pretending to be interested in Pedro and Tufto, and even to admire the mungoose; and then all at once they broke out in a desperate way, asking me to marry them. But indeed, Frank, it wasn’t my fault.”

“And it isn’t my fault that I love you to distraction, darling.”

That was a happy Christmas at Clevedon Hall—an innocent Arcadian Christmas; very different from the gourmandism and curaçoa-bibbing, and whist and écarté playing, which had obtained there when Sir Lucas was in his prime; a Christian festival, with much pampering and petting of the humble tenants, and pleasant party-giving in the servants’ hall. Sir Francis began like a prince who meant to be popular. They had plenty of friends already in the neighbourhood; everybody had been eager to know them; ancient squires, who remembered Sir Lucas in his best days, stretched out the hand of friendship to his son; matrons and daughters vied with one another in civilities to Sibyl.

There was a shade of disappointment when, about November, it began to be patent to the world within a twenty-mile radius of Clevedon that Sir Francis and Miss Davenant were engaged to be married. “Not one of the county families, you know, my dear, and altogether a poor match for him,” the Kentish damsel, told one another. It did seem rather a hard thing that the baronet had been so prompt in his wooing, that there should have been no clear course open to those fair young thoroughbreds, who would fain have entered themselves for the Clevedon Stakes.

Happy days and nights, thrice happy youth! Christmas and the New Year fled like a dream—skating on the great pond in the Chase, sleighing on the snow-bound roads; dinners, and carpet-dances, and acted charades. Sir Francis spent his money royally, but in simple pleasures, in which seven thousand a year

would go a long way. He had no idea of following in the footsteps of his father.

Spring came; a warm spring, with cloudless blue skies. Sir Francis and Miss Davenant were to be married when the Hawthorn was in flower. The Colonel was to take his daughter to London in April to complete her trousseau, and pay duty visits to numerous relations, who had a right to her confidence on such an occasion. Sir Francis could hardly be expected to exist in Kent while Georgie was staying at Westbourne-terrace; so he went up to town with the Colonel and his daughter, and established himself at a West-end hotel, within a ten minutes' cab drive of his betrothed. There were the settlements to be arranged; and the question of trustees, being propounded to the Colonel, sorely puzzled that gallant officer.

"I'm an old man myself," he said, "and never was a man of business, so I'm no good. I know plenty of men—men whom I could trust—but the misfortune is, they're most of them about my own age, so they're no good. A trustee to a marriage settlement ought to be younger than the husband and wife, by rights. I'll talk it over with old Vallory."

To talk things over with old Vallory—the great William Vallory, of the firm of Harcross, Vallory, and Vallory—was one of the Colonel's reasons for being in London. His wife had been a Miss Harcross, niece of that very Stephen Harcross who left all his money to Augusta Vallory, much to the indignation of his relatives. His brother, George Harcross, married the girl whom he, Stephen, had desired to marry; whereby the lawyer had abjured all kindred with his rival, and refused to see Georgina, his niece, the sole offspring of this marriage, until some time after her father's death, when he relented so far as to show some small kindnesses to her widowed mother. He was tolerably civil to that dashing young Lancer, Captain Davenant, who fell in love with Georgina Harcross and married her within the space of three months. The marriage settlement—a very small matter, the late George Harcross having failed ignominiously in the silk trade, and the Captain having little more than his sword to bestow on his wife—had been drawn up by Harcross and Vallory, and from that time forward Harcross and Vallory had been Thomas Davenant's solicitors. He had an unbounded confidence in their learning and sagacity, and it was to them he came naturally for counsel in his present difficulty.

He was admitted to a conference in that sacred chamber wherein William Vallory, in his own person, communicated the words of wisdom to his most distinguished—or most profitable—clients, a chamber almost as unapproachable as that inmost temple where the Mikado of Japan shrouds his glory from the vulgar eye. Here he found the chief of the firm trimming his

nails meditatively before a table covered with papers, and with three clerks in attendance, who vanished quietly on the entrance of the client.

"Come and dine with me this evening," said the solicitor, in his most cordial tone; "come to Acropolis-square, and we can talk the business over after dinner. Delighted to hear your daughter is going to make such a good match. I know something of the Clevedon estate; we had Sir Lucas in our hands, in point of fact, when he was a young man, and a deuced slippery customer he was. The property is clear, I hope, by this time?"

"The estate is as clear—as clear as—the Bungalow," exclaimed the Colonel, triumphantly.

"I beg your pardon——"

"The Bungalow—my little place at Tunbridge Wells. Enlarged and improved it with my own hands, sir; can lay a hundred of stocks or plaster a wall with any bricklayer in England. You ought to come down and see me, Vallory; I can give you a good bed, a good dinner, and a good bottle of wine."

"You are excessively kind—I should be most happy; but I have really so little time for relaxation, and when I can get a week or so, I run down to Ryde. Is Sir Francis in town?"

"Sir Francis is at the Leviathan."

"Then ask him to come with you, and your daughter too. My daughter and her husband are coming to me to-night—Mr. and Mrs. Harcross—he took the name of Harcross when he married, you know; it was one of the conditions of the will."

The Colonel did know, or had at any rate been informed of the fact at the time. A man who cared much for money might have scarcely relished the idea of meeting a lady in the possession of wealth which should by rights have come his way; but Thomas Davenant was not a lover of money, and was quite ready to clasp the hand of amity with Mrs. Harcross.

"Your son-in-law is beginning to make rather a figure in the world, isn't he?" said the Colonel, who was an assiduous student of the daily papers.

"My son-in-law is one of the best parliamentary barristers we have," replied Mr. Vallory, with a satisfied air. "The marriage had turned out so much better than he had expected. Hubert Harcross was making between two and three thousand a year, and Mrs. Harcross's visiting-book was becoming almost as aristocratic as the *Almanach de Gotha*."

"If you've a lot of people with you this evening, we shan't have much chance of talking over this settlement business," said the Colonel.

"Well, perhaps not an opportunity for any long talk; but I can think the matter over in the meantime, and give you my

opinion in three words. All you want is a good trustee; the settlement itself I can arrange with Sir Francis Clevedon's solicitor in an hour. You want a good man of business as trustee, and I have a man in my eye who'll suit you, if he will undertake the responsibility."

"Who is he?"

"Never mind that; I'd better sound him upon the subject before I mention his name. Half-past seven this evening in Acropolis-square, No. 10."

Colonel Davenant and his daughter were staying with a married sister of the Colonel's in Westbourne-terrace—a lady who had made a very good match in India under the Colonel's guardianship; and who, being childless herself, took an amazing delight in all the details of Georgie's courtship, and the preparation of the trousseau.

At half-past seven o'clock that evening the Acropolis-square drawing-rooms opened their lofty doors to admit Colonel and Miss Davenant, and Sir Francis Clevedon, announced by a grandiose air by Mr. Vallory's butler. There was a subdued murmur of conversation in the room as they entered. The Harcrosses had arrived, and the inevitable Weston Vallory was airing himself before the fireplace. Mrs. Harcross advanced with her father to receive Miss Davenant, and almost crushed poor Georgie with the splendour of her presence. The sparkling coquettish little face seemed well-nigh extinguished by Augusta's regular beauty, expansive figure, and gorgeous attire.

She was as cordial to Miss Davenant as she could be to any one. "I really feel as if we were a sort of cousins," she said, after the first greeting; "I hope we shall see each other very often while you are in town."

"Sir Francis Clevedon, my daughter, Mrs. Harcross," said Mr. Vallory; and Augusta made the baronet a gracious curtsy, which she had learnt from a French dancing-master; such a curtsy as Marie Antoinette might have made to a courtier in those days when she appeared above the horizon, "glittering like the morning star, full of life and splendour and joy."

But in the very act of acknowledging her father's introduction Mrs. Harcross gave a little cry of surprise.

"What's the matter, my dear?" inquired her father, surprised at this outrage of the proprieties.

"How strange that you never told me, papa!"

"Never told you what, my love?"

"Of the likeness between Sir Francis Clevedon and Hubert."

Mr. Vallory looked at his son-in-law, who was standing on the hearth-rug, listening, with no great appearance of interest, to some remark of Weston's—a tall commanding figure, a dark face which was distinguished-looking rather than handsome.

"A likeness between Sir Francis and Harcross," said the solicitor, looking from his son-in-law to the baronet. "Well, yes, there may be something of the kind; but, upon my word, I never remarked it until this moment, and I hardly think that Sir Francis will be flattered by the comparison. Harcross looks ten years older than he does——"

"But the likeness is something wonderful, papa. I beg your pardon, Sir Francis, for talking about it, but I was really taken by surprise; papa ought to have told me——"

"But, my dear, I didn't see the likeness."

"Then, papa, you can have no eyes."

"I really feel honoured by being supposed to resemble any one so distinguished as Mr. Harcross," said Sir Francis good naturedly. "Will you introduce me to him, Vallory?"

Mr. Vallory called his son-in-law, and Hubert Harcross came forward in his most leisurely manner, with that air of deliberation and absent-mindedness which was apt to be so aggravating to the other side in his parliamentary business; his opponents knowing fully well that, after opening a case as if he had forgotten what his brief was about, he would show himself presently a most consummate master of every detail and ramification of the affair in hand. He saluted the baronet with an almost insolent coolness, and went back to the hearth-rug as soon as the introduction was over, leaving his wife and her father and the Davenant party stranded by the ottoman, as on a green satin island in a Pacific Ocean of velvet pile.

Miss Davenant went down to dinner with Mr. Vallory; the baronet had the honour of escorting Mrs. Harcross; the Colonel gave his arm to a washed-out young lady in ringlets, who had been allowed to fill a corner of the table by reason of a fine contralto voice, which was useful as a second to Mrs. Harcross; and Hubert and Weston straggled in the rear. In so small a party, the conversation to be pleasant should be general; and happily where Colonel Davenant was there was no lack of talk. He plunged into his father the general's Peninsular experiences before the soup was done with; retreated gloriously from Corrunna with the salmon; took Badajoz while the whitebait was going round; and had followed Wellington to his tent at Waterloo by the time the last of the entrées had made its solemn circuit, where he kept that great captain wrapped in a profound slumber on the morning of the decisive battle, while he supplied himself with currant jelly for his final slice of mutton.

Sir Francis and Augusta Harcross talked to each other a little during this campaign. She expressed herself interested in Georgie. "Such a sweet face," and so on—quite the usual style of thing—a condescension which delighted the lover. "I'm so glad you like her: but everybody does; she finds friends wherever she goes," he

said. "You must come down to Clevedon and see us by and by. We mean to be quite settled by the autumn ; we shan't take a long honeymoon; in point of fact, all our life is to be honeymoon; but we shan't stay away very long, making believe to seclude ourselves from our fellow-men. We want to begin life at home as we mean to go on, a country squire and his wife—no pretence to fashion—easy-going comfortable people, with our friends around us."

"You will go into Parliament, I suppose?"

"Must I, do you think? Upon my word, I'd rather not; I don't fancy I've any of the necessary qualities for statecraft, and I want to be so much with Georgie. That sort of thing would keep me away from home, you know; for if one goes in for a thing at all, one ought to do it thoroughly."

"You'll have a house in town, of course?"

"No. When we want to come to London, we can take a furnished house. But we mean to live the best part of the year at Clevedon."

"Do you think Miss Davenant would like that?"

"I don't think she would like anything else. She has been brought up in the country."

Mrs. Harcross shuddered. What strange Arcadian notions this young man had! She wondered idly what her own life would be like, if she and Hubert were compelled to live in the country. What would they do with themselves? Would the isolation bring them any nearer together? She could fancy her husband yawning over his newspaper, as he yawned sometimes even now in Mastodon-crescent, with all the pomps and vanities of London at his elbow.

"Young people who are going to be married have such romantic notions," she said; "I daresay a year hence we shall hear of your furnishing a house in Mayfair."

The Colonel had done with Waterloo with the advent of the ice- pudding, from which culminating victory he harked back to Sir Arthur Wellesley and his brother the Marquis in India, and so brought himself to the later period of his personal experiences, into which he warmed with the dessert.

"What a nice person the Colonel must be to live with if he always talks in this style!" Weston remarked aside to Mr. Harcross, when the ladies had retired.

Georgie grew quite confidential with Mrs. Harcross in the back drawing-room, while the contralto lady yawned over a volume of Egyptian photographs, and wondered if the banquets of Thebes were as dull as the dinners of Acropolis-square. Encouraged by Augusta's air of interest, Miss Davenant told her a great deal about "Frank's" transcendent merits, and about the things they meant to do when they were married. Then there came music; Mrs. Harcross and Miss Parker the contralto sang "Deh Conte;"

Georgie consented shyly to warble one of her lover's favourite ballads, an old song of Haynes Bayley's, set to Sir Henry Bishop's music; and this, with a little desultory straggling talk in couples and trios, ended the evening's entertainment. Just at the last, Mr. Vallory took the Colonel into a quiet corner of the back drawing-room for a few confidential words.

"I have found you a trustee," he said. "My son-in-law, Harcross, has no objection to assume that responsibility, if you and Sir Francis would like him. He's a first-rate man of business, and a highly conscientious fellow."

"Nothing could be better," replied the Colonel carelessly, "if he'll take the trouble."

"Well, you know, I consider it a duty; Augusta's obligations to my friend, Stephen Harcross, seem to constitute a kind of connection between her and your daughter, and anything she or her husband can do to be useful, you know——"

"So be it," said the Colonel. "Of course I don't pretend to deny that I should have been uncommonly glad if old Harcross had taken it into his head to leave his money to my daughter instead of yours; but he didn't, and I bear no malice, and I'm pleased to see Mrs. Harcross take so kindly to Georgie."

Mrs. Harcross invited the Colonel and his daughter to dinner; she could give them the choice of two days—Tuesday and Thursday in the ensuing week.

"I should like you to come to me on my own day, Thursday if possible, for I shall have some nice people in the evening," said Augusta; so the engagement was made for Thursday, Sir Francis being of course included in the invitation. The business of the settlements would be arranged in the Old Jewry in the meantime.

"He is like you, Frank—that Mr. Harcross, I mean," Georgie said to her lover, as they drove home, "but not nearly so good-looking: I don't quite like his expression, he has such satirical eyebrows."

"Rather an off-handed beggar, certainly," replied Frank, "but he really has the Clevedon face, and reminds me of some of the old pictures at home. You see Nature can't afford an original pattern for all her children, she must fall into replicas now and then; Mr. Harcross is a decided infringement of the Clevedon copyright."

CHAPTER XXV.

MRS. HARCROSS AT HOME.

Six o'clock on a brilliant June afternoon, and Mrs. Harcross at home. The great drawing-rooms in Mastodon-crescent are filled

to the brim and running over with fluttering creatures in airy raiment: the rainbow sheen of silk and satin—the latest devices in Parisian millinery—transform the gorgeous rooms into a kind of human flower-garden; in contrast with these brilliant specimens of the human species, the very exotics in the conservatory opening out of the inner drawing-room pale their splendour. How poor and dingy a being then does the lord of creation appear, in his invisible-blue morning coat and quaker-like drab trousers, as he is hustled hither and thither amidst this many-coloured crowd! For the last two hours Mrs. Harcross's dearest friends have been fluttering in and out, so enthusiastic in their expressions of rapture on seeing her, that a bystander might fairly conclude that they had suffered an enforced severance of years. There are a few notabilities sprinkled about the rooms, people whom other people struggle to see, although inspection generally results in disappointment. Mrs. Harcross never permits herself to be at home without this sprinkling of notabilities. They have their function, like the satellites of distinguished planets, and she would feel herself small and mean without them. There has been some music, chiefly of the classical order; and in an off room downstairs there is a perennial supply of ices, and tea and coffee, which knights-errant, in very short coats and with flowers in their button-holes, carry upstairs with a perseverance that might almost prepare them for a course of treadmill. What with the classical music, the buzz of many tongues, sometimes in a polyglot jargon—for at least a third of Mrs. Harcross's visitors are foreigners—the heat, and the perfume of stephanotis from the conservatory, there have been a few stifled yawns, but, guilty as the delinquents feel, no one has seen them; and as the crowd begins to thin a little, the airy toilets melting away silently, like the sea foam receding from the shore, Mrs. Harcross feels that this particular Wednesday afternoon has been a success. Herr Thumpanthunter has been grander than usual in his exposition of Sebastian Bach; Mr. Rorhedd, the great naturalist, has given one of his liveliest descriptions of an interesting discovery of extinct mammalia on the coast of Peru; Lord Shawm, the evangelical lay-preacher, has held his own particular circle rapt and breathless in a corner of the back drawing-room, while he urged them to have their lamps ready. At a quarter-past six the two large drawing-rooms are empty, and Mrs. Harcross has flung herself wearily into a low arm-chair by one of the open windows. The wide stucco balcony is full of flowers, and slim iron pilasters, with Australian clematis and passion-flowers climbing up them, break the view of the tall straight line of houses over the way.

One of her guests still lingered, the indefatigable Weston. He was standing by the low mantelpiece, glancing over his

shoulder at the reflection of his faultless morning coat—the very smallest thing in coats—a mere segment of a coat, as it were.

"Trying, isn't it, this kind of afternoon?" he remarked at last by way of commentary upon a profound sigh from Augusta.

"I don't know that I ever felt so completely worn out," replied the lady. "There were so many second-rate people, such bustle and clatter—second-rate people are always noisy."

"Do you think so?" demanded Weston with his languid air—the stereotyped languor, and quite different from Mr. Harcross's languor, which had at least the merit of originality—"do you think so? I thought your heavy swells were noisiest—royal dukes, and that kind of thing. I fancied the afternoon was a great success. Lord Shawm was in very good form: how the girls thronged round him in his corner! It was quite a blockade of the back drawing-room door. And Rorhedd was uncommonly lively. Did you see him flirting with that girl in pink, the prettiest girl in the room? I've observed that your elderly scientific party has always a correct eye for that kind of thing."

"I didn't see anybody," Augusta replied, rather peevishly; "I was tired when the thing began: and I have no one to help me. I believe Hubert makes a point of being away."

"He had a parliamentary case on at three, hadn't he?" inquired Weston, sticking his glass in his eye, and taking another backward glance at the reflection of his coat. He began to think there really was a wrinkle at the back of the left armhole.

"I am sure I don't know; of course there's nothing easier than to say he has a parliamentary case, when I want him to be at home."

"Come, come, Augusta," said Weston, in a soothing tone, "I'm sure Harcross is quite a model husband,—in his own fashion."

Mrs. Harcross turned on him more angrily than he ever remembered her to have done in all their intercourse.

"In his own fashion!" she exclaimed; "what do you mean by that? Have you ever heard me complain of him?"

"I really imagined you were complaining of him just now."

"Not at all. If I complained of anything, it was of that herd of people. I think I never had so many that I don't care a straw about knowing."

"Ah, my dear, if we could go through life with only the people we do care about knowing, how very small a world we might live in! But I fancy I have an expansive soul: I really like everybody."

They lapsed into silence.

"A screw loose somewhere about our friend Harcross," mused Weston Vallory, "but it seems rather too soon for me to put my ear in."

He watched his cousin as she lay back in her chair, gazing absently at the flowers in the balcony. An occasional brougham rolled swiftly by, and now and then there came the slow tramp of a foot passenger. The dinner-party traffic had not yet begun, and at this time of a summer evening Mastodon-crescent was as quiet as the grave.

"O, by the way," said Weston, after a long pause, "I brought you something this afternoon."

"Did you?" Mrs. Harcross inquired, without turning her head; "new music, I suppose?"

"No, a print for your portfolio; rather a rare one, I believe. A proof-engraving of a picture by Sir Thomas Lawrence; one of his latest."

"You're very good," Mrs. Harcross said, with a slight yawn; "I don't pretend to care much for that kind of engraving. I like the German school so much better. But your present shall have a place in my portfolio. Where is it?"

"I left it in the refreshment-room; I'll send for it, if you'll allow me." He rang, and dispatched a servant in quest of a roll of paper, left somewhere in the cloak-room. Mrs. Harcross had not ceased from her contemplation of the ferns and geraniums in the balcony when the parcel was brought. Weston unrolled it carefully, and came to the window with it.

"Rather a good face, isn't it?" he asked standing at his cousin's side, holding the engraving up to the light. "A great deal of character about it."

Augusta looked up with the air of being supremely bored by the whole business, but at sight of the picture started to her feet with a cry of surprise.

"Weston!" she exclaimed, "don't you know what it is?"

"A very charming portrait of a very charming woman, I've no doubt," he answered carelessly, without taking any notice of his cousin's astonishment.

"You've been in Hubert's chambers, haven't you?" she asked sharply.

"Yes, three or four times. Mr. Harcross has not shown so warm an appreciation of my visits as to induce me to go there oftener."

"But you have been there, and you must know that picture!"

"Upon my honour, I cannot perceive the faintest connection between the two ideas."

"Nonsense, Weston; there is only one picture in Hubert's room, the portrait over the chimneypiece, and that print is a copy of it."

"Really, now!" said Weston, with a most natural air of surprise. "Yes, I do remember rather a striking picture in Harcross's room. I concluded it was something he picked up

in Wardour Street, or at Christie's, perhaps; likely to catch a man's eye as rather a nice bit of colour. But I had quite forgotten it. Yet I had a notion, when I found this thing in a portfolio of old-fashioned engravings at Tombs's, that I had seen the face somewhere before. This is a portrait of Mrs. Mostyn, the actress, renowned in comedy before the days of Mrs. Nesbit. You are too young even to have heard of her."

"An actress!" exclaimed Augusta, very pale.

"Yes, here's her name at the back, written in pencil: 'Portrait of Mrs. Mostyn, as Viola in *Twelfth Night*, painted by Sir Thomas Lawrence.' Why, my dear Augusta, how pale and scared you look! One would think you had made a most appalling discovery. Mrs. Mostyn has been dead thirty years; Tombs told me all about her; you can't possibly be jealous of her!"

"Jealous!" cried Augusta, with a look that ought to have annihilated him. "What a fool you are, Weston!" and then in quite a different tone, and to herself rather than to him, she repeated, "An actress!"

She was silent for some moments after this, and then turned to her cousin suddenly, and said,—

"You heard all about this Mrs. Mostyn, you say. Was she a good woman?"

"Good is such a very wide word, Augusta. She was very charming, Tombs tells me, and extremely good-natured."

"You know what I mean, Weston," Mrs. Harcross exclaimed impatiently. "Was she a respectable woman?"

Weston shrugged his shoulders.

"I hardly think the dramatic profession went in for respectability very seriously thirty years ago," he said. "The women were handsomer than any we have now, but I believe their reputations leaned rather the other way. Of course there were a few brilliant exceptions. As for this Mrs. Mostyn, Tombs's account was rather vague. She was not very long before the public, but during her brief career was the rage. She was a married woman, I suppose, or else why the 'Mrs.'? but Mr. Mostyn appears to have been a somewhat mythical character. She had numerous admirers among the men about town of that day—men who wore straps to their pantaloons, and incredible hats, you know, Augusta, and sometimes even turned back their wristbands—and is reputed to have finished her career by running away with one of them."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and one of the worst among them, but Tombs had forgotten the man's name. He was quite clear about the main facts, however. The lady was spirited away one fine morning, during the run of a new comedy at the Coliseum Theatre, to the consternation of the manager, and was seen no more. She is

supposed to have died abroad a few years later. I asked what became of Mostyn, or what Mostyn said to the elopement; but he appears not to have expressed any opinion; in point of fact, no one seems to have known Mostyn. Curious, isn't it? However, the lady may have been a widow when she made her *début*."

Augusta had taken the engraving from her cousin's hands, and sat looking at it in silence for some time after he had told her all he could tell about the subject of the picture. Weston strolled out upon the balcony, amused himself by some small horticultural experiments, plucking off a faded leaf or two, and coaxing the tendrils of the clematis into a more graceful twist, but he kept his eye upon his cousin nevertheless. She seemed to emerge from a profound reverie by and by, rose from her low chair, and threw the picture on to a side-table with her most indifferent manner, and then joined Weston on the balcony.

"Thanks for the engraving," she said; "I have no doubt it is a very good one; I daresay Hubert picked up the original portrait very much in the manner you suggest, at a time when he was not rich enough to invest largely in pictures. Hark! isn't that his step in the Crescent?"

Weston peered over a stucco vase filled with scarlet geranium.

"Yes, I perceive Mr. Harcross half-a-dozen doors off. What a correct ear you have, and how I envy Harcross the faculty of inspiring such solicitude!"

"Do you?" Augusta demanded coolly. "I suppose, when you marry, your wife will know your step, unless she has the misfortune to be deaf."

"An alliance with deafness is a calamity I am very sure to escape," replied Mr. Vallory sententiously.

"Indeed!"

"Because I mean never to marry at all."

"O, I daresay you'll change your mind on that point when you meet the right person."

"My dear Augusta, it is my unhappiness to have met the right person!"

The look, the tone, were unmistakable; nor was Mrs. Harcross the kind of woman to affect unconsciousness.

"If you are going to take that sort of tone, Weston," she said, with a freezing look, "I shall be under the unpleasant necessity of shutting my doors upon my first cousin."

"O, I see. A tame cat must never show temper; his existence must be one continuous purr. Forgive me, Augusta; I promise not to offend again; but you must never talk of my wife in the potential mood. There can be no such person. I am a confirmed bachelor, and have no higher vocation, nor aspire to anything higher, than to be your slave."

This was a kind of homage to which Mrs. Harcross had no

objection. She gave Weston her hand—a very cold hand on this sultry summer afternoon—and gave him a smile that was almost as cold.

"You have always been very good," she said; "I should be extremely sorry if anything were to interrupt our friendship."

She was quite sincere in this. Weston was really useful to her; fetched and carried; hunted lions for her; kept her posted up in that superficial knowledge of passing events without which conversation is impossible; supplemented her own reading, for which the claims of society scarcely left her one clear hour a day, by his much wider reading; did a hundred small things for her, in fact, which she sometimes felt ought to have been done by her husband. But Weston Vallory always seemed to have so much more leisure than Mr. Walgrave Harcross.

Walgrave Harcross came in almost immediately upon the reconciliation of the cousins, and flung himself into a chair with a suppressed yawn.

"Not begun to dress, Augusta?" he said, in a surprised tone; "Weston must have been uncommonly interesting. Are you aware it's seven o'clock? I never yet knew you to dress under an hour; and in all my calculations I generally allow you something more like two."

"I'll say good-bye," said Weston; "I don't think I've been an obstacle to the toilet, have I, Augusta? You rarely stand on ceremony with me."

"Not at all. I don't think I shall go out to-night."

"Not to 'dear Lady Basingstoke's,' Augusta? I thought you and she adored each other."

"I would rather disappoint any one than Julia Basingstoke," replied Mrs. Harcross; "but I have an intolerable headache. Don't stand staring at me in that pitying way, Weston. I only want a little rest. You can go to the dinner without me, Hubert. I know Julia is very anxious to have you there."

Weston shook hands and departed, curious and thoughtful. "There's something queer about that picture," he said to himself, as he walked Charing-crosswards; "and I wouldn't give very much for Mr. Harcross's domestic felicity this evening. Yet it can hardly be jealousy—of a woman who died thirty years ago—unless that portrait in his chambers is an accidental likeness of some one he has cared about. Perhaps *that* is Augusta's suspicion. Yet, if that were the notion, why should she be so strangely affected at finding out the history of the picture? It's a queer business, altogether; but I'm very glad I came across that engraving at Tombs's, it may serve me as a fulcrum!"

"I'm sorry you can't go to the dinner," said Mr. Harcross, with his eyes half closed. He would sleep for ten minutes or so at will, and arise from such brief slumber like an intellectual

isn't refreshed. "Was the herd larger than usual, and more than usually oppressive?"

"I have had rather a fatiguing afternoon; and as you can never give me any assistance——"

"My dear Augusta, were I the idlest man in the world, I should shirk that kind of thing. I have not the knack of seeming enchanted to see a host of uninteresting people. I rather like a good ponderous dinner—people brighten wonderfully amidst the clatter of knives and forks and the popping of champagne corks; and if one has a good cook, as we happily have, one sees one's friends at their best under those genial influences. But an afternoon party—a crowd of meanderers circulating idly, buzzing like so many gadflies, a little music, a little literature, a little science, a little religion, a little scandal, all going on at once in the most distracting manner—upon my word, fashionable woman must be a devoted creature if she can stand that kind of thing. But had I been ever so willing, I could not have been at home this afternoon; we had a field-day in the committee-room."

Augusta was standing by the open window, pale as her muslin dress. Should she talk to him now, or wait till he returned from the dinner? That which she had to say to him was of an agitating nature; she, who was ordinarily so serene and emotionless a creature, felt that she might hardly be mistress of herself when once that subject was broached between those two. Would it not be best to wait till night, when there would be no hazard of a servant coming in suddenly while they were talking? She looked across at the clock on the chimneypiece—a quarter-past seven, and at eight Mr. Harcross was due at her dear friend Lady Basingstoke's. She had promised her dear Julia that he should come; and she knew that her dear Julia relied upon him as the intellectual Samson who was to sustain the weight of a somewhat heavy banquet; for dear Julia's guests were exalted, but dull. If they were both absent, people might talk—indeed, if even one were wanting, people might talk—since she herself had been seen that afternoon in all her accustomed brilliancy. Mrs. Harcross shivered at the thought that her dear friends might lay their heads together, as the phrase goes, and speculate about her—might even conjecture that she and her husband had quarrelled. She knew that was the general opinion when a wife, from any unexplained cause, failed to come up to time.

"I have a distracting headache, Hubert," she said; "but perhaps I had better go with you. I know dear Julia depends upon us."

"Very well, my dear," murmured Mr. Harcross, without opening his eyes; "go by all means, if you really think you can dress in three-quarters of an hour. Or couldn't you wear that

peach-coloured and white thing you have on? It's uncommonly pretty."

Mrs. Harcross looked down at her mauve-silk train and Indian-muslin overskirt, with a contemptuous shrug.

"I wonder you can propose anything so absurd, Hubert, when I have been seen in this dress by at least a hundred people this very afternoon, Julia Basingstoke amongst them."

"In that case you had better make haste. I can dress in twenty minutes."

Mrs. Harcross took the engraving from the table where she had thrown it, rolled it up carefully, and carried it away to her dressing-room, where she locked it up in one of her private drawers before she rang for Tullion, the maid. At five minutes before eight she came downstairs in her evening splendour, radiant in pearl-gray satin, and airy tulle, with great bunches of crimson azaleas gleaming amidst the cloudy draperies, and a coronet of azaleas and diamonds on her dark hair. If there were any glory in being the husband of one of the handsomest women in London, Mr. Harcross certainly enjoyed that distinction.

But there was no elation in his countenance to-night, as he stood at the foot of the stairs and calmly surveyed the splendid figure descending towards him. If his wife's splendour and beauty evoked any feeling in his mind it was wonder—wonder that any human creature of average intelligence could be satisfied with a life so empty—this perpetual shifting of gorgeous raiment, this house which was never a home.

Mrs. Harcross had usually plenty to say for herself, in a certain commonplace way; but to-night she was silent, though the drive to the Tyburnian district, where the widowed Lady Basingstoke had set up her tent, was rather a long one. Mr. Harcross was tired, and leant back in the carriage, without any disturbing considerations about his "back hair," and closed his eyes. He was not offended by his wife's silence, nor did it inspire him with those vague apprehensions which some men are apt to feel under such circumstances, a foreboding of certain lectures to come. He concluded that "the herd" had been troublesome, and this particular Wednesday afternoon a failure.

The evening at Lady Basingstoke's was as other evenings. Mr. Harcross talked a good deal, and talked well. In the brief pauses of his life, between the day's labour and the evening's pleasure, a man may reflect upon the emptiness of this kind of existence, and tell himself that it is all vanity; but once in the ring, with all the light and sweetness of society around him, his spirits are apt to rise. The intoxication is of the highest, perhaps, but pleasant enough while it lasts. Nobody at Lady Basingstoke's could have supposed that Mr. Harcross was tired of life.

Dear Julia thanked her dear Augusta with effusion at parting.

"So good of you to come. I never saw Sir Thomas Heavitree so agreeable; he and Mr. Harcross seem to get on so well together. It was quite a relief to see him so much amused."

"I'm very glad we were able to come, Julia. Hubert had a committee before the Lords to-day. I was half afraid he would be too much exhausted to dine out."

"But he is so wonderfully clever, and takes everything so coolly. I should fancy he could hardly know what fatigue means. But *you* are not looking well to-night, Augusta. I observed it at dinner. I never saw you so pale."

"I daresay it's the colour of my dress—rather an old colour, isn't it? I told Bouffante so, but she insisted upon my having it."

"Your dress is lovely, dear, as it always is. But you really are not looking well."

With these and many other expressions of sympathy the friends parted, and Mrs. Harcross went off, with Hubert in her wake, feeling tolerably satisfied with his evening. The party had been rather a dull business perhaps, but he had been the source and centre of any brief flashes of brilliancy that had enlivened it. This kind of social success was one of the prizes that he had set himself to win, or rather an appanage of his professional position. He had nothing better to look forward to, only to mount a little higher upon the ladder which he had been slowly ascending from his youth upwards, and every rung of which was familiar to him. Were he to become Lord Chancellor, life could give him very little more than it gave him now. He had reason to be content.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MR. AND MRS. HARCROSS BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER.

"WILL you come into my room for a few minutes' talk before you go upstairs, Hubert, I want to ask you a question?"

Mrs. Harcross made this request on the threshold of her morning-room, just as her husband was turning towards that secondary staircase which led to his dressing-room.

"I am quite at your service, my dear Augusta. This is just the time in the evening when I have the least possible inclination for sleep. What is it about? Another dinner at home, made up on purpose for Sir Thomas Heavitree? I fancied you were meditating something in the carriage, you were so unusually

silent. You didn't even say anything about Lady Heavittree's cheese-coloured moire, with satin upholsterer's work about the skirt, which I really thought would provoke your powers of ridicule."

He strolled after his wife into the pretty chintz-draped sitting-room, where a moderator lamp shed its chaste light on a table heaped with new books and periodicals. The easiest chairs, the most perfect appliances for writing in all the house, were to be found here. Mr. Harcross dropped into his favourite chair by the fireplace, which was artistically screened at this season by a little grove of ferns.

"I was not thinking of anybody's dress to-night," Mrs. Harcross said moodily.

"Indeed! then I may fairly conjecture that, like Louis XV. when he didn't hunt, your majesty did nothing."

"You are very polite. I hope my ideas do sometimes soar above toilets, even in society, where one is not supposed to think very seriously. But to-night my mind was absorbed by a somewhat painful subject."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I certainly thought you were comfoundedly quiet. Is it anything wrong in the house? Does Fluman want to better himself?"

Fluman was a butler of unusual accomplishments, who had assisted Mr. and Mrs. Harcross to maintain their establishment at its high-pressure point of excellence.

"How can you be so absurd, Hubert? As if I should allow myself to be worried by anything of that kind!"

"But I can't conceive a greater loss than Fluman. We should collapse utterly if he left us in the middle of a season. I'm sure, at the beginning of a dinner, when things look rather dull, I often say to myself, 'Never mind, we are in the hands of Fluman;' just as in graver affairs one would say, 'We are in the hands of Providence.' I think he has recondit arts in the administration of his wines—derived from the Romans, perhaps, who cultivated dining from a more artistic point of view than we have ever attained. I have seen him warm the stupidest people into sprightliness by judicious doses of Château d'Yquem; and if conversation flags towards the close of the banquet, he can work wonders with *parfait amour* and dry curaçoa. I should consider it a domestic bereavement if he wanted to leave us. If he were to take it into his head that he was losing caste by living with a professional man, for instance, or anything of that kind."

"When you have done talking nonsense, Hubert, I shall be very glad to speak of serious things. I suppose that is the sort of stuff with which you ~~are~~ ^{are} one another in your arbitration cases."

"There is a good deal of nonsense talked, I daresay. An arbitration case is a comfortable free-and-easy kind of affair, that pays uncommonly well. And now, my dear, what is this serious business, and why do you sit staring at me in that moody way?"

There was something in his wife's face that he had never seen there before—something that set his heart beating a little faster than usual—something that sent his thoughts back to one dreadful day in his life, the day when Grace Redmayne fell dead at his feet.

"Do you remember the day when I called on you at your chambers, Hubert?"

"Certainly; I remember your coming to the Temple one afternoon, on some important matter. Your visit was not a very startling event; of course my chambers are always open to you."

"I saw a picture there—a portrait—which you told me was a portrait of your mother."

"Yes; I recollect your remarking my mother's portrait. What then?"

"It really is your mother's picture, Hubert?" his wife asked, very earnestly. "It is not an accidental likeness of any one else; of some one of whom you may have thought I should be jealous? You were not deceiving me?"

His dark face had flushed to the brow at this suggestion.

"It is not in the least like any one else," he said; "it is my mother's likeness."

"Indeed! Then I think it would have been to your credit if you had been more explicit on the subject of your antecedents, when you first spoke to my father about our marriage."

He started to his feet with a quick indignant movement; but in the next moment settled himself calmly in his favourite pose against the angle of the mantelpiece.

"I cannot quite follow your line of argument, Mrs. Harcross," he said; "I shall be obliged if you will make it a little clearer."

"I had a print brought me this afternoon; an engraving of the picture in your chambers."

"Indeed! I did not know the picture had been engraved. I shall be very glad to secure a copy."

"Your mother's name is written on the back of the engraving—it is a proof before letters—and the person who brought me the picture told me her history."

"May I inquire the name of the person who took so much trouble about my family affairs?"

"I would rather not tell you that."

"I will not press the question. I think I can make a shrewd guess at the identity of the officious individual."

"There was nothing officious in the business. The person who

brought me the picture—as a rare engraving worth adding to my collection—had no idea of any connection between you and the original of the portrait.”

“Innocent persons! Those fetchers and carriers are such simple unsuspecting creatures. And so, through this unconscious informer’s aid, you have discovered that my mother’s name was Mostyn; and that she was an actress, I presume. Was it this appalling discovery that troubled you all the evening?”

“Yes, Hubert. I have been very much disturbed by this discovery; and, painful as it is, still more so by your want of candour.”

“Indeed! What would you have wished? That I should tear the plaster from a very old wound, never quite healed? That I should have lifted the curtain from a picture that I have made it the business of my life to shroud? Did I ever boast of my antecedents, Mrs. Harcross, or endeavour to exalt myself in your eyes? When I asked you to marry me, I offered you myself, with all my chances in the future. I said nothing about the past, nor can I conceive that you have anything to do with it, or the shadow of a right to call me to question about it.”

“The story is quite true, then?” asked Augusta, white to the lips, and with the hand that held a gauzy kerchief round her trembling visibly. “This Mrs. Mostyn was an actress, and your mother?”

“She was both. She died in Italy before I was five years old; but she lived long enough for me to love her tenderly. Be good enough to bear that fact in mind when you are talking of her.”

“And the rest of the story is equally correct, I conclude—the lady closed her career by an elopement?”

“She began her career, so far as I am concerned, by an elopement!” Mr Harcross replied coolly. “She ran away with my father.”

“And was married to him, I suppose?” his wife said breathlessly.

“That is a question I have never been in a position to solve,” answered Mr. Harcross. “If he did marry her—as I am naturally inclined to believe he did—he never acknowledged the marriage in any public manner, and—he broke her heart.”

The last words came slowly, and with an evident effort. “He broke her heart,” he repeated to himself, as the force of his own words came home to him. It was not the only heart that had been so broken.

“You have not condescended to tell me the name of your father,” said Augusta after a little pause.

“O,” cried her husband, his face lighting up with a sudden flash of triumph, “your informant—the useful person—did not

enlighten you on that point! Then I decline to eke out his information. I refuse to answer the question which you ask so graciously."

"As you please," she said, in an icy tone. "The name could make very little difference. It would not make the dishonour deeper, or less deep; nothing can add to or lessen the shame I have felt to-day."

"What is my birth to you?" cried Hubert Harcross passionately. "Have I failed in one tittle of my bargain? Have I fattened on your fortune, or wasted your substance, or given myself up to a life of pleasure, as nine men out of ten would have done in my circumstances? Do you presume to call me to account, because there is possibly the bar sinister across my escutcheon? What does it matter to you whose son I am, so long as I perform my part of the transaction which you and I entered upon three years ago? You are ashamed of my mother! Why, in heart, and mind, and everything that makes a woman beautiful, she was immeasurably your superior! She did not dress three times a day, or live only to fulfil the debtor and creditor account in her visiting-book. Indeed, she was a woman who could exist without a visiting-book or a French milliner. At the time I remember her she was the devoted slave of a scoundrel, long-suffering, tender, enduring neglect and hard usage with an angelic patience, made happy by a smile or a careless word of kindness. O God, such a life, bitter enough to stamp its cruel details on the brain of a four-year-old child! My mother was a woman of a thousand, Mrs. Harcross, although she sacrificed fame and fortune to a most consummate villain."

For some moments Augusta Harcross sat silent, speechless with passion, and with the fleecy folds of her cloak clasped convulsively across her breast, by a hand which no longer shook—a hand which had grown rigid, as in some mortal convulsion of soul and body.

"I am obliged to you for this sudden burst of candour," she said at last. "It has, at any rate, the merit of novelty, and it is just as well that I should understand your appreciation of my character. I am immeasurably the inferior of an actress—a lady whose first husband was problematical, and about whose second alliance there seems hardly room for doubt; and after marrying me under false pretences, you coolly refuse to tell me your father's name, and insult me when I express my sense of shame on discovering the cruel blot upon your birth. If you had told me this story when you asked me to be your wife, I might have overlooked the disparity of our positions, might have shut my eyes to the past——"

"That is to say, the daughter of Mr. William Vallory, the cage pilot of the perilous straits of Basinghall-street, the

guide, philosopher, and friend of insolvent mankind, might have deigned to overlook the want of blue blood in the veins of her suitor. That is what you mean, I suppose. If I had sued very humbly, and shown myself supremely conscious of my abasement, you might have forgiven me for not being a scion, in the direct line, of the house of Stanley or Russell."

For once in her life Augusta Harcross gave way to a little burst of womanly feeling. She rose suddenly, and went towards the door leading to her dressing-room, and then pausing on the threshold, turned to her husband. "I believe I could have forgiven you anything, Hubert, but the confession that you have never cared for me."

Something in her tone and look touched him, even in the midst of his indignation. He went over to the doorway, and stopped her as she was leaving the room.

"Never cared for you, Augusta!" he repeated. "What foolish stuff all this is! Why do you goad me into a furious passion, and then take what I say for gospel? Forgive me for anything savage I may have said just now, it had no real meaning. I was stung to the quick by your contemptuous allusions to my mother. I give you my honour, Augusta, she was a good woman. Whatever may have been the mystery of that fatal alliance, I would pledge my life that she was guiltless. I am never likely to know the details of that story; why should you wish to be wiser than I? Let it rest with the dead. My childhood and youth were protected by a friend of my father's, a man whose nature was as noble as his was base. Come, Augusta, be reasonable," he went on, regaining something of his usual easy manner. "Forgive me for any nonsense that anger may have made me say just now, and let us drop this subject at once and for ever. This is the first time it has been broached between us. Be wise, my dear, and let it be the last."

"As you please," Mrs. Harcross replied coldly. "Since nothing you could tell me could possibly lessen the pain this discovery has given me, I am not likely to torment you with any farther allusion to it. As for what you said of myself just now, I may forgive, but I am not very likely to forget it."

"Did I say anything very ferocious?" asked Mr. Harcross with a little careless laugh; "pray take it all for what it was worth, Augusta. A man's tongue runs at random when he is in a rage. Upon my word, I don't know what I said. I was very fond of my poor mother—I can see the dear face now, not what it is in that portrait, but faded and careworn as it grew before she died—and when I consider what her life might have been, and how that villain ruined it, there is no limit to my hatred of his memory. But I will never speak of him again. Shake hands, Augusta, and forget that I have been a brute."

So there was reconciliation and peace; rather a hollow peace, perhaps, at the best, but sufficient for the preservation of the amenities of domestic life, which were not outraged that season by any obvious estrangement between Mr. and Mrs. Harcross. To the polite world they were still "My dear Hubert" and "My dear Augusta," nor did footmen breaking in upon their privacy with a coal-scuttle or a salver of letters ever discover them sulky or quarrelsome. Yet Mrs. Harcross had in nowise forgotten the impulsive utterances of that night, and the bitter doubt of her husband's affection came very often between her and the joys of millinery.

Nor could she teach herself to forget that miserable discovery which Mr. Weston Vallory's good-nature had assisted her to make. There are some women in whose gentle souls the knowledge of such a blemish in the life of their best beloved would have inspired only a supreme tenderness and pity, women who would have loved Walgrave Harcross only so much the more—who would have been so much more proud of the reputation he had won for himself, for the sad story of his birth and childhood. But Mrs. Harcross was not such a woman. She never thought of her husband's secret without thinking how it would look in the eyes of her own particular world if it were suddenly made public—as it might be, she told herself, at any moment. She had no power of looking beyond that narrow circle in which she revolved. Westbourne-terrace bounded her world on the north-west, and Eccleston-square on the south; Brighton and Scarborough, Ems and Spa, were the outlying dependencies of this empire. Of the vast mass of humanity outside her sphere, of the great human race of the future, to which, should her husband win greatness, he might safely confide his fame, Mrs. Harcross thought not at all. Had her husband been an Erasmus or a Raphael, she would have still been ashamed of him, with *that* blot on his escutcheon.

"I have often felt uncomfortable when my friends have asked about his people; whether he belonged to the Walgraves of Cheshire or the Hadley Walgraves, and so on," she said to herself. "What shall I feel now?"

Walgrave Harcross went on his way, and made no sign. Everything prospered with him; his reputation ripened like fruit on a southern wall. He had a wonderful knack of making the most of his successes, without any appearance of self-appreciation. Men of high repute deferred to him, and acknowledged that in his own particular line he was unapproachable. The reputation was not, perhaps, a very lofty one, he was hardly on the high-road to become a Bacon, or even a Thurlow; but it was a reputation that made him a marked man at dinner-parties, and raised Mrs. Harcross day by day just a step higher on the

crowded slope which leads to that Heavenly Jerusalem of "the best society;" and this state of things would have entirely satisfied Mr. Vallory's daughter, had it not been for that bitter secret which vexed the repose of her soul.

Wide as the gulf had always been between husband and wife, it widened a little more after this, or perhaps it was rather that the severance became more perceptible. There was a kind of embarrassment in their intercourse. Hubert's manner was at once cold and apologetic. Augusta gave way to melancholy by the domestic hearth, instituted a chronic headache, and isolated herself in her morning-room with the ferns and chintz rosebuds. That splendid interior in Mastodon-crescent did not make a lively picture, when there were no guests to call forth the social instincts of Mr. and Mrs. Harcross. But they never quarrelled; on that point Augusta congratulated herself with a lofty pride.

"I have never quarrelled with my husband," she said to herself, "not even on that dreadful night when he deliberately insulted me."

There were not many evenings, however, on which the house in Mastodon-crescent was thus gloomy. During the season, Mr. and Mrs. Harcross rarely stayed at home together, except to receive company. There were occasions when the gentleman excused himself from going out, and sat alone in the chilly library till the small hours, cramming himself with facts and figures for the next day's business; but Augusta was not fettered by his labours, and went forth alone, radiant and splendid, to awaken envy in the breasts of less fortunate matrons.

Mrs. Harcross and Georgie Davenant became fast friends in the interval that elapsed before the damsel's marriage. Georgie was an enthusiastic worshipper of the beautiful, and that cold perfect face of Augusta's had won her heart at once. She exalted the lawyer's daughter into a heroine, and was as much flattered by Augusta's notice as if she had been one of the greatest ladies in the land. Other girls had complained of the impossibility of "getting on" with Mrs. Harcross, but bright little Georgie warmed the statue into some kind of life. If Mrs. Harcross could be warmly interested in any subject, that subject was dress, and at such a period it was naturally a theme of no small importance in the eyes of Miss Davenant. In giving her new friend her sympathy, Mrs. Harcross perhaps regarded her less as a young lady who was going to be married than as a young lady who required a trousseau. She carried Miss Davenant about shopping with her in her own barouche, or brougham, as the weather suggested, until Mrs. Chowder, the damsel's aunt, feeling herself a creature of limited ideas in comparison with Mrs. Harcross, dropped into the background quietly, and contented herself with ordering *recherché* luncheons for her stylish guest, and placidly coinciding with all Augusta's opinions.

By Mrs. Harcross Miss Davenant was presented to the great Bouffante, who consented, although the pressure of business at this time was something unprecedented,—the Duchess of Durham's water-party, Lady Doldrum's private theatricals, Mrs. St. Quintaine's fancy ball, all crowding upon the mighty mind of the milliner within a single fortnight,—consented, solely to oblige Mrs. Harcross, to undertake a considerable portion of Miss Davenant's outfit. It was a favour which Georgie must of course feel to the end of her life. The two ladies kissed each other in the brougham after it was all settled. They had spent a whole afternoon at Bouffante's, turning over silks and satins, and consulting about fringes and laces, gimps and furbelows, and refreshed by afternoon tea, served on a massive salver by the milliner's lacquey.

"Bouffante gives herself intolerable airs," said Mrs. Harcross; "but her style is inimitable. No one can touch her."

"How ever shall I bring myself to wear those dresses!" exclaimed Georgie; "it's delightful to choose them, but, do you know, I can't imagine myself flourishing about in them; I should have to give up the society of Pedro, and all the rest of the animals. I have scarcely ever worn anything but piqué or holland, so that I could run about the garden and play with the dogs just as I liked. But imagine me in that mauve silk smothered with chenille fringe, like the picture Madame Bouffante showed us, and half-a-dozen Newfoundland puppies scrambling into my lap."

"My dear child, you must give up those abominable dogs and that atrocious monkey when you are married. I hope you don't mean to overrun Clevedon with such creatures."

"Not have some of my dogs to live with me!" cried Georgie, with a piteous look. "Of course there are some that are such favourites of papa's, I couldn't rob him of them. But I must have some at Clevedon. Besides, Frank adores dogs. I wonder you don't care for them. Don't be offended, Augusta, but do you know, that splendid house of yours always seems to me rather dull because there are no dogs in it. I shouldn't appreciate the handsomest drawing-room in England, if there were not a Maltese terrier or a Skye on the hearth-rug."

"Perhaps you miss something else in my house," said Augusta, with rather a moody countenance. "I have no children, you know."

"O, dear no, it was not that," exclaimed Georgie, blushing, and fearful that she had wounded her friend; "I never thought about the absence of children. I have not been accustomed to children, and am not extraordinarily fond of them. It sounds dreadful to say that, doesn't it? I see dear little blue-eyed things in the cottages where I visit, and they seem to take to

me; but, O dear, their poor little noses and pinafores are so dirty, and their fingers always wet or sticky, and I can't help thinking that Newfoundland puppies are nicer."

Sir Francis Clevedon and Miss Davenant were to be married at Kingsbury. Mrs. Harcross went down to the Bungalow to be present at the wedding, but Mr. Harcross was compelled to forego that pleasure. Every hour of his working day was appropriated, just at this time, he told his wife: the thing was utterly impossible.

"It's excessively provoking, Hubert," said Mrs. Harcross, when he demonstrated this fact to her. "I hate going amongst a herd of strangers without my husband."

"But your dearest Georgie and your dear Colonel are not strangers."

"Of course not, but their friends are. It seems so unnatural for me to be there without you. However, I've promised Georgie, and can't disappoint her."

"Go, my dear Augusta, and enjoy yourself. What is that song Miss Davenant sings, 'They tell me thou'rt the favoured guest'? Go, and be the favoured guest, my dear; I shall be pleased to know you are happy while I am drudging in the committee-room."

"The session will be over soon, and then, I suppose, I shall occasionally be favoured with your society," said Augusta, with rather a sulky air.

"Of course, my dear. But upon those occasions when I can give you my society you are apt to be afflicted by one of your headaches."

Augusta was silent. It was not a tête-à-tête evening with her husband for which she languished. She wanted him to escort her to flower-shows and evening parties. She wanted the world to see that her marriage was a happy one.

"I am afraid people will think there is some estrangement between us, Hubert, as we are so rarely seen together," she said.

"What does it matter what people think, so long as we are not estranged?" asked Mr. Harcross in his coolest tone. "Besides, we are continually being seen together. Only, when you ask me to go down to Tunbridge Wells for a couple of days in the busiest part of the year, to see a young lady married, you ask an impossibility."

"Kingsbury Church," said Augusta meditatively, "isn't that the little village church you told me about in one of your letters from that farmhouse you went to for change of air after your illness?"

"Yes, it was King something—Kingsbury, perhaps."

"And the name of the farmhouse—I've forgotten it. What was the name of the farmhouse, Hubert?"

"Upon my word, my dear, I've forgotten it too," Mr. Harcross replied, after a pause. "But what can it matter?"

"Not very much, certainly; only, if we are driving about while I am at Tunbridge Wells, I should like to have a look at the place where you stayed so long. You sent me quite a fascinating description of it, you know, in your usual off-hand way. I should like to have seen it."

"There is nothing worth seeing, my dear. It is a nice old-fashioned place, smothered with roses; but you may see half-a-dozen such in every rural neighbourhood. You'd better not trouble yourself about going to look at it. I believe the people I stayed with have left the country."

"How odd! I thought that kind of people were fixtures, rooted as firmly as their trees."

"There are tempests that tear up the strongest oaks."

"That sounds as if there were some romantic story connected with the people."

"Nothing more romantic than insolvency. The farmer had been doing badly for some years when I was there, and I believe he got tired of failure at last, and shipped himself and his family for one of the colonies."

"How very sad!" exclaimed Mrs. Harcross, and the subject was exhausted.

It was not quite done with in the mind of Hubert Harcross, however. He had but a slippery hold on facts and figures that night as he sat alone, pretending to work, in his gloomy den. The memory of the past was strong upon him,—alas! when was it ever weak? But to-night it was stronger than usual.

Kingsbury Church! How the very name of the place brought back the memory of that first Sunday; the very atmosphere with its balmy warmth and rustic quiet; the fair young face looking up at him in that homeward walk by the fragrant hedges; the utter peacefulness in his own heart, which had not yet gone astray! Yet was not that guiltless Sabbath afternoon the commencement of his undoing? Kingsbury Church! Would to God he had married her there, and so escaped the horror of knowing himself her murderer, and so won her for the joy and comfort of his days!

"I would not have let her die," he said to himself. "I would have made her life so bright and happy. What a sweet flower it was, lying in my hand, and I flung it away! Yet, O God, how could I dream that I should kill her? How could I tell that she was of so much finer a clay than other women?"

Mrs. Harcross came back from the Bungalow directly after the wedding, much pleased with her entertainment. There was a little dinner in Mastodon-crescent that evening,—a small and careful banquet made for two or three legal luminaries whom it

suit Mr. Harcross to gratify by such trivial amenities. Weston was there, in his capacity of cousin and tame cat, and to Weston and her husband Mrs. Harcross gave an animated account of the interesting ceremony in the back drawing-room after dinner, while the legal luminaries were disputing over their teacups in the front, and Mr. Harcross, in his office of host, was for the moment off duty.

"Georgina looked lovely," she said. "There was the usual string of bridesmaids, but the only pretty one among them was Sir Francis Clevedon's sister. You ought to know her, Weston; such a nice girl, and a capital match, no doubt."

"Pray do not cherish any benevolent intentions on my behalf in that line, Augusta," replied Mr. Weston Vallory, with his supercilious air. "I am not in the market."

"What a misfortune for Miss Clevedon!" said Mr. Harcross. "Then the wedding was a success, Augusta?"

This was the first opportunity husband and wife had had for conversation since Augusta's arrival from the railway station, just in time to dress for dinner.

"Everything was charming, Hubert. That Kingsbury Church is the dearest place in the world; such a perfect bit of rustic architecture, set in such a delicious landscape. You were not half enthusiastic enough about it in your letter; but, then, you never are enthusiastic."

"What, you know the neighbourhood?" asked Weston, with an inquisitive look.

"Yes, it was near Kingsbury that Hubert found the funny old farmhouse where he recruited his health three years ago," replied Augusta. "I referred to one of your letters, Hubert, and discovered the name of the place," she went on to her husband. "It is called Brierwood. I made the kind old Colonel drive me to see it yesterday afternoon. Such a sleepy old place, and with quite an uninhabited air. I suppose the people have emigrated, as you said."

"Did you inquire?" asked Mr. Harcross, with a splendid indifference: the bar had made him an accomplished actor.

"No. There was no time. We had to get to your romantic Brierwood by all manner of cross roads, and we were afraid of being late for dinner, at least the Colonel evidently was: and I didn't like to press the point, though I had quite a fancy for seeing the inside of the old house where you stayed so long. How could you possibly endure such dulness for all those weeks?"

"I wanted rest, you see, Augusta; and it was an advantage to be remote from society."

"And then there may have been some accidental relief to the dulness," said Weston, with his favourite "snigger;" "a rustic

flirtation, perhaps. A man does generally get up some kind of flirtation in that sort of place. It is a natural product of the soil."

Mrs. Harcross gave him a withering look, but Mr. Harcross vouchsafed no notice.

"I am glad things went off pleasantly," he said to his wife, with a glance at the group in the next room, holding himself ready to spring upon them the moment conversation flagged.

"I never saw a sweeter wedding, so rustic; the church was decorated with flowers, all white and pink. I think I never saw so many azaleas, not even at St. Sulpice's on Whit Sunday."

"Where do they go for their honeymoon?" inquired Weston languidly.

"To Switzerland. Georgie has travelled so little, and Sir Francis is to show her everything she is most anxious to see. But they are to be at Clevedon early in August, and I have made a promise for you, Hubert."

"Indeed, you should never promise anything except for a godchild. What pledge have you taken on my behalf?"

"I have promised that we will spend the last two weeks in August with the Clevedons. Now there's no use in shrugging your shoulders like that, Hubert. The session will be over, no committee-rooms, no law-courts. You can have no possible excuse for objecting."

"Only that I detest staying in other people's houses."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Harcross, looking fixedly at him with her cold hazel eyes. "Do you feel so much out of your element among county people?"

It was a little involuntary burst of that slow fire which had smouldered in her heart of late. She was vexed with herself the moment after she had spoken.

"Well, no; I am not the kind of person to torment myself with an idea of my own inferiority, even to county people: and I certainly should not consider myself the inferior of Sir Francis Clevedon."

"The Clevedons seem to think themselves very great people, at least Sibyl told me a good deal about their ancestors when she was showing me the family portraits."

"Did she favour you with a sketch of her father's character?" asked Mr. Harcross, coldly.

"No; the father appears to have been hardly a nice person. Neither Francis nor his sister talked much of him. Now mind, Hubert, I have set my heart on this visit, and I do hope you will not oppose me."

"I think I rarely oppose you in any reasonable desire. But it's hardly worth while laying out our campaign for the end of August at the beginning of June. I must go and talk to old Shepeskinn. Won't you sing, Augusta?"

"In order that those horrid lawyers may talk all the louder. I'll play, if you like. Will you get me a volume of Mendelssohn out of the stand, Weston?—the blue morocco volume."

Weston found the volume, and stood by his cousin as she played, turning the leaves correctly to a crotchet, and talking to her in the pauses of the music. He asked a good many questions about Kingsbury, and the old farmhouse in which Hubert had stopped, and seemed singularly interested in this episode in the life of Mr. Harcross. But he contrived to put his questions in the airiest manner, and Augusta's only idea upon the subject was a conviction of her cousin's frivolity.

"I shouldn't wonder if there were something mysterious in that farmhouse business," Weston said to himself, as he smoked a midnight cigar during his homeward journey to the Surrey hills. "Harcross looked rather glum when I mildly suggested a possible flirtation in that quarter. Did ever any man on the right side of forty live six weeks at a farmhouse without a stronger motive than the desire for fresh air and new-laid eggs? And I remember how uncommonly close my friend was on the subject of this rustic excursion when I met him in Acropolis-square, the day after his return. I am inclined to think there is something; and if there is, look out for squalls, Mr. Harcross. I've had a trifle too much of your *de haut en bas* manner, to say nothing of your having swindled me out of the woman I meant to marry, and I should vastly like to drop down upon you unexpectedly some fine morning."

Christian meditations to carry through the soft summer night, but they were hardly unpleasant to the soul of Weston Vallory: they did not gnaw or rend his vitals with a vulture-like rending, but agreeably titillated his senses, and gave a zest to his contemplation of the future. He felt so sure that, sooner or later, he should be able to drop down upon his fortunate rival.

"That little account has been a long time standing, my friend Harcross," he said to himself, "but I mean to square it."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"MORE FELL THAN ANGUISH, HUNGER, OR THE EEA."

CHANGES at Brierwood. The land was let off to a sturdy red-faced farmer sprung from the peasant class, who lived with his numerous progeny in a roomy cottage remote from the old homestead: a substantial tenement, which had been built for

the occupation of a bailiff in the days when the Brierwood people were gentry. The house and garden remained cared for by Mrs. Bush, the charwoman, and her husband, who was of the gardening persuasion. No article of the old furniture had been removed, but the rooms were for the most part tenantless. For the last twelve months Richard Redmayne had been across the seas, at Bulrush Meads, where James and Hannah's industry had created quite a model domain. He had been to see how they thrived, but the prosperity of his estate gave him little gladness. She who was to have been the glory of his home could never look upon those fertile valleys, could never wander by his side across those breezy hills. The brightness and the beauty of his life had vanished; he lived on, ate, drank, slept even, very much as he had done before, and did not always dream of her. But, O, how often—how often in his slumbers the pale sweet face smiled at him; he heard her voice, felt the touch of the clinging hand, and told himself that it had all been a delusion, a false alarm—she was not dead. And then came the waking and the dreary reality. She was gone!

"God's curse light on her murderer," he said to himself, "as my hate and vengeance shall follow him to the end!"

Time had not dulled the edge of his hatred. Of the man who had tempted Grace away from her home he never thought but one thought. That man had slain her—killed her as surely, and with as deep a villany, as if he had planned and executed a deliberate murder.

"He would have slain her soul," he told himself. "There was no earthly friend to save her. God sent his angel Death to snatch her from him. But that man would have killed her soul. Is he less guilty of her death because he did not mean to kill her body? And when his fancy had tired of her, would he have cared in what river she hid her dishonour?"

James tried his hardest to detain his brother on that side of the world.

"You've no call to go back, Rick, old fellow," he said. "You've let the land to a good tenant. Why shouldn't you step with us for the rest of your days, and take your own place as owner of the property? The climate suits you. There's plenty for you to look after here, a good horse for you to ride, and good friends to keep you company within a day's easy journey. What have you got to do in England?"

"To find the man who murdered my daughter."

"Poor Gracey! Well, it was the next thing to a murder," said James, who had shed not a few quiet tears over his niece's fate, brushing a rough hand across his eyes many a time when Grace's image rose before him as he walked alone in the sunshine. He had children of his own, and loved them heartily

but not as he had loved Gracey. She seemed so different from them—like a moss-rose in a cabbage-garden.

"It was a cruel thing to tempt her away, Rick; but, you see, we don't know. He may have meant better than we think. He may have meant fairly by her; there's no knowing."

"Don't talk like a fool, Jim. Does a man ever mean honestly who acts as that man acted? Mean fairly by her? Why, he lied about her when she was dead, as he had lied to her when she was alive; perjured himself, and called her his sister, because he knew himself to be a villain, and hadn't the manhood to speak the truth, even when she was dead, even when she lay dead under his roof. Thank God, she died! It is hard to lose her; yet I say, thank God, she died! And O, Jim, if you know me at all, you know that I would barter all the rest of my life against one year with her."

"Stay with us, Rick; stay, and be master here, where it's all your own."

"No, Jim. I'll get a lawyer to draw up a deed of gift, and make you a present of this place. I may come back some day, when my business is done, and end my days in peace among you. I can never know peace at Brierwood any more. But I'm bound to go back there for a little while. I've something to do."

"Come, Rick, be reasonable. What's the good of hunting after a needle in a bottle of hay? You'll never find that man; and if you did find him, what then?"

"I'll settle that when I've found him. That's enough, Jim; I'm bound to sail in the *Lucy Ashton* next Thursday week."

He sailed in that teak-built clipper, made the homeward voyage once more prosperously, and came to Brierwood one bright June afternoon, when Kingsbury joy-bells were ringing as if they had gone mad.

"What's all that row about?" he inquired of Mrs. Bush, the housekeeper, as he walked in at the open kitchen-door with the air of having come home from a day's outing. He had crossed the fields, and come in by the garden. There was no pleasure in such a coming home—no expectation. His fields were in the possession of others; his house was kept only in memory of the dead, as he would have kept a tomb.

"Lor, Mr. Redmayne!" cried Mrs. Bush, letting fall a loaf which she was in the act of taking from the oven; "what a turn you did give me, to be sure!"

"I told you I should come back some day."

"Yes, to be sure; and we've looked for you many a time, but not expectin' to see you so suddint, without so much as a line to say you was comin', and your bed not aired nor nothink. But we'll soon get things straight. There's a beefsteak in the larder, as I got for my Sam to-morrow, and I can cook a bit of dinner."

for you, and have everythink comfortable. And I hope you've kept your health, sir, while you've been in foreign parts."

"I've been tolerably well; the climate yonder suits me. What are those confounded joy-bells ringing for?"

"Don't you like 'em, Mr. Redmayne? I think they're so cheerful when they ring like that. I don't much care for them of a summer's evening rung slow, they make me feel solid. Don't you know about the wedding? It's a great day for Kingsbury, and there's a dinner at Clevedon—my good man's gone there. Sir Francis Clevedon was married at Kingsbury Church this morning."

"O, Sir Francis is come home, is he?" said Richard listlessly, looking round the familiar room, with its heavily timbered ceiling, and lattice windows looking out on a spacious stone yard, and tumble-down low-roofed outhouses, a pump, an empty dog-kennel, and half-a-dozen fowls scratching on a shrunken manure-heap. How well he remembered Grace flitting in and out of the old stone-flagged kitchen, pretending to help a little in the household work, sitting down by a sunny window to shell a great basket of peas, and running off before they were half done, and forgetting to come back!

"Sure to goodness, Mr. Redmayne, didn't you know about Sir Francis?" exclaimed Mrs. Bush, who evidently supposed that English newspapers would have made it their business to supply the colonies with the latest news of Clevedon Hall.

"How should I know?"

"Dearey me! He's been back going on for a year. Let me see, it was last August as he come, and you not to know anythink! He was married this morning to as sweet a young woman as you ever see—Colonel Davenant's daughter of the Wells. I went over to see the wedding, but it was as much as I could do to get inside the church-door. I don't suppose as Kingsbury Church was ever so full since it was built."

Richard Redmayne seemed quite indifferent to Sir Francis Clevedon and his affairs. He left the kitchen, and roamed through the old house, unlocking the doors of the rooms, which had been kept carefully locked in his absence, and going into one after another, only to stand for a little while looking round him, with a slow half-wondering gaze, as if he could hardly believe he had ever lived there. The rooms were all faultlessly clean, but had a damp chilly atmosphere, and a certain dreariness of aspect, as if they had been thus shut and thus disused for the last fifty years. If Richard Redmayne had been a believer in ghosts, he might almost have expected to see one in those dusky chambers, where the half-opened shutters let in the afternoon light grudgingly, leaving obscure corners where a ghost might lurk. But for Rick Redmayne there was only one shadow, and that was with him always

He had lived and been happy in those rooms once upon a time. His thoughts went back to the days of his early manhood, before his wife's death, to pleasant peaceful days, when his worst care had been a doubtful harvest or sickness among his cattle, and from that quiet time they went to the summer afternoon on which his young wife left him smoking his pipe in the garden, left him with a light word and a loving smile, a little look back at him which he remembered to this hour, and thus left him for ever.

Bitter memories! Can any life into which death has once entered ever again be perfectly happy? Rick Redmayne had outlived the sharpness of his grief, but not the grief itself. Ten years after that day of horror, with his fair young daughter by his side, loving her with all the force of his strong heart, the recollection of that loss was as fresh in his mind as it had been in the first week of bereavement. And now that Grace was gone, he forgot the tranquil years that had intervened between those two great sorrows. It seemed to him rather as if an angry Deity with one sweep of his hand had left him desolate, robbed him of all hope and comfort.

If he had any virtue, it was that of Job. He did not curse God, and die. He lived: but he lived to cherish a purpose which perhaps was worse than the suicide's desperate sin. He lived on in the hope that fate would give his child's false lover into his hands—a vague blind hope at the best, but strong enough to keep him alive.

Sorely had he changed since that day when, dashed a little by misfortune, but still daring and hopeful, he had asked the indulgence of his creditors before he sailed across the world to redeem his fortunes. In mind and body the man was alike altered; moody where he had been social—doubtful and suspicious where he had been open and trusting as a child—brooding alone over his injuries, angry with the very world for having held such a traitor, rebellion, against his God for having permitted such a wrong. In his outward aspect even the change was striking. It was not so much that his dark brown hair was streaked with iron-gray, that there were deeper lines than his actual years would have warranted upon the handsome rugged face.

The change of expression was a greater change than this. The face had hardened, the eyes and mouth had grown cruel. At its best now the expression was at once gloomy and reckless; at its best the face of Richard Redmayne was the face of a man to be feared.

He came back to his old home, but not to his old habits, or his old friends. The friends had fallen away from him long ago, chilled and repelled by a change so obvious. Of the details of that sorrow which had changed him, the outer world, his small world, knew very little. People in Kingsbury knew that Grace

Redmayne had gone away from home, and had died away from home, but when and where she had died had been told to none. This very silence was in itself mysterious, and to the minds of most people implied disgrace—some sad and shameful story which the girl's kindred kept hidden in their own hearts.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"BUT O, THE HEAVY CHANGE NOW THOU ART GONE!"

RICHARD REDMAYNE sat in the old rooms, and paced the old garden, or lay smoking his pipe on the grass under the cedar day after day, and made no attempt to occupy himself, physically or mentally, but let the days drag themselves out how they would. They were very slow to pass, yet so empty, that when gone they seemed to have travelled swiftly, like the days in a workhouse or a jail, where there is no greater event to mark the passage of time than the monotonously recurring hours for meals. He shrank from being seen in his old haunts, and from being greeted by his old companions. If he had himself committed some unpardonable crime against society, he could hardly have avoided his fellow-men more persistently than he now avoided all the friends of his youth and manhood. He rarely went beyond his own garden and orchard in the daytime; but at night sometimes, when the rover's restlessness was strong upon him, he would set out long after dark, walk fifteen miles, or so, across country, in a reckless mood which took no heed of distance or direction, and come back to Brierwood in the dewy dawn, worn out and haggard.

"I try to walk the devil down, you see, Mrs. Bush," he said to his housekeeper, on returning from one of these rambles, a speech which filled the honest woman with consternation.

"There's something unked about Richard Redmayne," she told her husband. "I don't think he's ever been quite right in his head, poor soul, since he lost his daughter."

He was in England, and he had come back to find his child's destroyer, yet he did so little. He went up to Mr. Smotheys's office, made an appointment with Mr. Kendel, the private inquirer, and offered that gentleman any terms he chose to demand if he would only find the man who had called himself "Walgry" on one occasion, and "Walsh" on another.

He pressed the business with such a feverish eagerness, that Mr. Kendel, who did not by any means see his way to making the required discovery, affected a kind of hopefulness for very charity.

"It is rather a difficult matter," he said. "You see, I have positively no clue. The man takes a furnished house at Highgate, gives it up, pays every one in cash, no cheques or anything of that kind, and vanishes. I have no photograph of the man, no knowledge of his surroundings, antecedents, anything; and yet you ask me to pick him out from the entire population of this city, supposing him to be an inhabitant of this city, which we are by no means sure he is."

Richard Redmayne sat with his back to the dusty window of the dusty office, listening to these arguments with a gloomy countenance.

"Never mind the difficulty," he said abruptly; "it's your trade to get over that. If it was easy to find him, I should have found him long ago. Find him, Mr. Kendel, and I'll pay you what you like for your difficulty."

"But, my good Redmayne," said Mr. Smoothey, in his comfortable family-solicitor-like way, "supposing the man found, what then? You have no redress. The law which makes abduction a crime would not tell here, since your daughter was nineteen years of age. Nor can you prove that any wrong was done her, or that any wrong was intended. To what end, then, would you trace the offender?"

"Never mind what end. Find him for me, that's all I ask you to do. I may have my own manner of reckoning with him. I want to see him face to face. I want to be able to say, 'You killed my daughter.'"

"Upon my honour, Mr. Redmayne, I think you look at this business from a very false and fatal point of view. Granted that a great wrong was done in tempting your poor child to leave her home; but remember that it is a kind of wrong committed almost every day, and a kind of temptation to which every good-looking young woman among the middle classes is more or less subject. The fatal result was not a part of the wrong, not contemplated by the wrong-doer. Had your daughter lived, who knows that this gentleman might not have married her? Even if it were not his immediate intention to do so, he might have done so ultimately, prompted by conscience and affection."

"Don't try to humbug me by that see-saw kind of argument—if he didn't and if he did," cried Rick Redmayne roughly. "I only know that he stole my daughter away from her home, and that she died of the shame he brought upon her, and that I hold him her murderer."

There was no use in talking to such a man. The words of wisdom were wasted on this passionate undisciplined soul. Mr. Smoothey shut his spectacle-case with rather an impatient snap.

"You must do as you please Mr. Redmayne," he said. "I

have no doubt Kendel will do his best with your business, and of course any legal advice you may want from me is at your service; but I really cannot see your motive."

"That man's in a bad way," said the astute Kendel, when the farmer had left the office. "The sort of man who would scarcely surprise me if he did something desperate. I shan't help him to find the seducer. In the first place, I consider the thing beyond the limits of possibility; and in the second place, even if I could find the man, it would go against my conscience to have any hand in bringing those two together. Yet you know, Smoothey, that my conscience is rather elastic."

"Toughish, certainly," answered the lawyer; "and warranted to stretch. However, I quite agree with you about this poor fellow Redmayne. The man has brooded on this subject until it has become a monomania."

Richard Redmayne went back to Brierwood soon after this interview, believing he had done his uttermost, but not till he had been to look at the cottage where his daughter died, and the grave in which she lay. The pretty little gothic bandbox on Highgate Hill was let. He could only prowl up and down by the railings for a little, screened by the laurel hedge, listening to the fresh voices of children in the tiny garden. There were guelder roses in bloom, and a bed of standard roses in the centre of the miniature lawn, bird-cages in the open window, the whole aspect of the place bright and joyous. He looked up at the window of that room where they had laid her in the last solemn slumber, looked at it, and thought of the day when she had lain there, a dull November day, with the rain beating against the window-panes, perhaps, and all nature gloomy. It wounded him to see the house under this cloudless June sky, to hear happy voices from the room where she had died broken-hearted.

He walked all the way to Hetheridge—seven miles along the dusty north road, then away westward, by a quiet cross-road, to the quietest village within twenty miles of London. He passed the village green, and the pond where the ducks were floating lazily in the sunshine, and went on beneath the shelter of chestnut and lime to the churchyard where Grace was buried. This sixth of June was her birthday, and he had chosen this day of all others for his pilgrimage to her grave.

"I might have brought some flowers or something," he said to himself as he opened the low wooden gate. "What a hard-hearted wretch I must be not to have thought of it! Did I ever go to see her empty-handed when she was at school?"

The churchyard was not a particularly pretty one, only very solemn and tranquil, with a great yew-tree making a wide circle of shadow above the quiet green hillocks. There was no splendid monuments of modern date, but here and there a ponderous

tomb within a rusty railing, a mouldering stone sarcophagus, with sinuous ivy creeping in and out among the cracks in the stone, and a dank moss thick upon the time-worn inscriptions. The charm of the scene was its utter tranquillity. A village churchyard on a hill, with a wide stretch of landscape below it, and only the faintest indication of a city in the far distance.

Richard Redmayne found his way to the gravestone. Was not every detail of the quiet scene burnt in upon his brain? The churchyard was empty of all human kind, yet on the granite slab there lay a wreath of waxen-petalled exotics, all purest white, and as fresh as if it had been that minute laid there.

Rick Redmayne went back to the gate, striding over the low graves recklessly. Who was there to bring votive wreaths to her grave—who, in all her little world—except the man who had destroyed her?

"He has been here," the farmer said to himself; "is here still, perhaps, loitering somewhere. O God, if I could only meet him, 'n this place, by her grave! It seems the fittest spot for us two to come face to face; and if we do meet here, I think I shall strangle him."

The muscular hand closed with a tighter grip upon the oak sapling which Mr. Redmayne carried as a walking-stick.

He planted himself by the church-yard gate and waited listening for a footstep on the gravel-path.

"I wonder that he can have the heart to stand beside her grave, knowing that he killed her."

He was not softened in any degree by this indication that his lost child was still held in loving remembrance. His only sentiment was wonder that her destroyer could presume to lay his wreath upon her grave—that he dared approach the scene which must needs remind him of his crime.

He waited an hour with a dogged patience, but no one came. Then he made a careful round of the churchyard, and meeting no one, knelt down and said a short prayer by his daughter's tombstone; not such a prayer as Christianity inspires—reverent, submissive, confiding; but tinctured rather with that fiery spirit which might have breathed in the supplications of some outraged father in the old Greek days, when men's gods were of the sternest mould; an appeal to the Eumenides—a blind wild cry for retribution.

He took the wreath in his strong hand when that prayer was ended—took it, intending to scatter those frail blossoms to the summer winds. The delicate petals seemed almost to shrink and shiver in his rough grasp; but after looking at it for a few moments with a moody countenance, he laid it gently on the stone where it had lain when he found it, encircling his daughter's name.

"She was so fond of flowers, and these white sweet-scented ones above all," he said to himself. "No; I won't spoil it, even though he put it there."

He rose at last and left the churchyard, meaning to make inquiries in the village as to the appearance of any stranger who might have been observed by the innkeeper or his gossips. In so small and primitive a place a stranger could hardly escape observation; but at the gate Richard Redmayne encountered the sexton, who had espied him from his cottage a few paces off, and had come out to see whether there might not be a sixpence to be earned in this direction.

"Would you like to see the church, sir?" he inquired.

"No; I don't care about churches. Have you been about here all the morning?"

"Yes, sir; in and out, on and off."

"There's been a man here; a man who brought some flowers to lay upon one of the graves."

"Like enough, sir. There's many as bring flowers; that's the beauty of this place; nobody ever interferes with 'em; the children never lays a finger on 'em."

"You haven't seen any stranger, then, this morning?"

"Well, yes; there was a gentleman I met, coming out of this here gate, like as I might meet you now this minute, above an hour ago."

"You didn't know him?"

"Not to call to mind his name; but I know his face well enough. He's got somebody buried with us, I make no doubt."

"Does he come here often?"

"Not as I know of. I took the liberty to wish him good-morning; but he only made answer by a nod, and walked off before I could ask him if he'd like to see the church."

"Look here," said Richard Redmayne, with his hand in his pocket. "Here's half-a-crown for you. Tell me what the man was like, as close as you can, and I'll make it five shillings."

He tossed the coin to the sexton, whose shrivelled old countenance wrinkled into a rapturous grin.

"Lor a-mussy, sir, I wish I were a better hand at that sort o' work. The gentleman were tall and dark, with his eyebrows marked very strong, like, givin' him rather a fierce look. His face looked to me as if it were made of wrought iron; but he was a personable sort of a man for all that, and quite the gentleman."

"That will do," said Richard Redmayne, throwing him a second half-crown. "If ever that man comes this way again, you get some one to follow him, and if you find out where he goes, and where he lives, I'll give you a five-pound note. Remember that."

"Lor, sir, it's a thing as I never did in all my born days," cried

the sexton, gazing at Rick Redmayne with an awe-stricken countenance; "you bain't one of these here perlice orcifers in plain clothes, be ye?"

"Never mind what I am; you do what I tell you, and earn a five-pound note. You can telegraph to me at this address when you find out what I want to know, and you shall have your money by return of post."

Rick Redmayne wrote his address on a page of his pocket-book and tore out the leaf, which he handed to the sexton.

"I am as willing as any one in Hetheridge to earn a honest penny, sir; but follerin' any one do seem so out of the way and under'-and-like. Certingly, there's my grandson Thomas, as sharp a lad as ever any one need wish to see, and as fleet-footed, he might foller any gentleman afoot or a-horseback, and I don't believe as he'd be left behind; and a rare artful lad too, and an uncommon favourite with our parson! Lor, how he do give out the responses in the psalms; you might a'most hear him out here—that sharp and shrill!"

"Find out where this man lives, and earn your money," said Mr. Redmayne. "Don't lose that bit of paper with the address. Good-day."

He walked away rapidly, leaving the sexton pondering, and scratching his head with a puzzled air.

"As to artfulness," he muttered to himself with an inward chuckle; "if it comes to that, our Thomas might get his livin' by follerin'; but I don't know what parson would say to it. Howsumdover, there's no call for him to know."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A RECOVERED TREASURE.

RICHARD REDMAYNE went back to Brierwood after his visit to Hetheridge churchyard, and the dreary days went on. A ghost pacing those garden walks, or loitering under the old cedar could hardly have been a more dismal figure than the farmer, with his listless gait and haggard face, unshaven chin and slovenly attire. He was waiting idly for his agents in London to do something; speculating on the possibility of discovering his enemy by the intervention of the sexton—a dreary business altogether; his land in other hands, no work to be done, no interest in the young green corn, no care, no hope; his whole being consumed by one fatal passion—more constant than love, more bitter than jealousy.

He had not spoken to John Wort since that night when he burst in upon the agent in his little office,—sudden and violent as a thunderbolt. The two men avoided each other. Mr. Wort had his own reasons for that avoidance, and Richard Redmayne shrank from all companionship. He smoked all day long, drank more than he had been used to drink in the old days, and paced the weedy gravel path, or lay at full length under the cedar, lost in gloomy thought. If he had needed any external influence to sharpen his sense of loss, the familiar home, once so happy and now so desolate, would have furnished that influence; every flower in the garden, every petty trifle in the house, where all things were old and familiar, was in some wise associated with his daughter. He could not have felt her death more intensely if he had spent his days and nights beside her grave.

The longest day had dragged its slow length along, and the corn was beginning to change colour, when, after some weeks of sultry and oppressive weather, there came a great storm—one of those tempests which spread consternation over all the country side, filling the souls of farmers with hideous visions of beaten corn and lightning-struck cattle, and which people talk of and remember for the rest of the year. It was on a Sunday evening, just after church-time, when the first thunder-peal roared hoarsely among the distant hills, and the first vivid flash of forked lightning zigzagged across the low leaden sky. Richard Redmayne was sitting under the cedar, smoking, as usual, with an unread Sunday paper lying on his knee, and his eyes fixed dreamily on the line of poplars that rose above the garden wall. He was not afraid of a little thunder and lightning, and sat for a couple of hours, after this first swelling chord in the tempestuous symphony, watching the progress of the storm with a gloomy delight in its awful grandeur, with almost a sense of relief in this sudden awakening of earth and sky from their summer silence, as if his own sluggish heart were stirred and lightened a little by the storm.

It was only when the rain began to fall in torrents, and Mrs. Bush came out, dripping like a rustic naiad, under a dilapidated cotton umbrella, to entreat him piteously to come indoors, that he roused himself from that morbid sympathy with the elements, and rose from his bench under the cedar, stretching himself, and looking round him half bewildered.

"It's that dark as you can't see your hand before you, Mr. Redmayne, between whiles, and that vivid when it lightens as you can distinguish every leaf on the trees, and to think of you sitting here all the time! My good man says as how you must have gone to Kingsbury village. I've been that fidgety about you, I didn't know what to do; so at last I says to my Sam, 'If I gets wet to the bone, I'll go and see if he's in the garden.'"

and as soon as I come to the edge of the grass, which is like a bog, it lightened just in my eyes like, and I see you sitting here like a statter. You'll be a lucky man, Mr. Redmayne, if you are not laid up with the rheumaticks along of this night's work."

"A few drops of rain won't hurt me, Mrs. Bush; but I'll come indoors, if you like. The storm is worth watching; but I reckon it'll be bad for Davis's corn. It's lucky the hops are no forwarder." Davis was the tenant, for whom Mr. Redmayne had some natural compassion, as became a man whose interests and desires had once been bounded by those hedgerows.

He went indoors to oblige Mrs. Bush, but would not allow the garden door to be barred that night, and sat up long after the housekeeper and her husband had gone to their roost in their garret—till the tempest was over, and the sun was shining on the sodden trees and beaten flower-beds, and the birds were twittering in the calm morning air, as in the overture to *William Tell*. He walked round the garden, looking idly at the ruin of roses and jasmine, carnations and lavender bushes, before he went upstairs to his room.

It was late when he came down to his solitary breakfast, and the countenance of Mrs. Bush was solemn with the weight of a startling communication when she brought him his dish of eggs and bacon.

"Such a calamity, Mr. Redmayne," she exclaimed; "I felt certain sure as the storm would do some damage; and it have. Mr. Davis have had a fine young heifer struck dead, and the pollard beech in Martinmas field is blown down."

"The old pollard beech!" cried Richard; "the tree my mother was so fond of,—and Grace too. I'm sorry for that."

Mrs. Bush shook her head in a dismal way, and sighed plaintively. He so rarely mentioned his daughter, although she was bursting with sympathy.

"And so she was, Mr. Redmayne—poor dear love—uncommon fond of Martinmas field and that old tree. I've seen her take her book or her fancy work up there many an afternoon, when you was in foreign parts. 'I'm tired of the garden, Mrs. Bush,' she'd say; 'I think I'll go up to Martinmas field, and sit a-bit.'"

"And I used to say, 'Do, Miss Gracey; you look to want a blow of fresh air;' for she was very pale that last autumn before we lost her, poor dear. And when the hop-picking was about, she'd sit under the pollard beech talking to the children, no matter how dirty nor how ragged, she was that gentle with 'em. It was enough to bring the tears into your eyes to see her."

"I'm sorry the old beech is gone," said Richard thoughtfully. He remembered a tea-drinking they had had by that tree one

mild afternoon in the hop harvest, and Grace singing her simple ballads to them afterwards by the light of the hunter's moon. What a changed world it was without her!

He made short work of his breakfast, which was as flavourless as all the rest of his dismal meals; and set out immediately afterwards to inspect the fallen beech in Martinmas field. Very rarely had he trodden the land tenanted by Farmer Davis, but to-day he was bent on seeing the nature of the accident which had robbed him of one of his favourite landmarks, the tree that had been ancient in the time of his great-grandfather.

The ruin was complete; the massive trunk snapped like the spar of a storm-driven vessel, broken short off within three feet from the roots. A couple of farm labourers—men who had worked for Richard Redmayne when he farmed his own land—were already hard at work digging out the roots, which spread wide about the base of the fallen tree. Farmer Davis was a smart man, in the transatlantic sense of the word, and did not suffer the grass to grow under his feet.

"Gettin' rid of this here old beech will give him a rood of land more at this corner," said one of the men, when Mr. Redmayne had surveyed the scene, and said a word or two about the storm. "He allus did grumble about this tree, the grass was that sour under it; so now he'll be happy."

"I'm sorry it's gone, for all that," replied Rick, contemplating it gloomily.

He seated himself on a gate close by, and watched the men at their work, idly and hopelessly, thinking of the days that were gone. He sat for nearly an hour without speaking a word; and the men glanced at him now and then furtively, wondering at the change that had come upon him since the old time when they had called him master. He took his pipe from his pocket, and solaced himself with that silent comforter. He was sitting thus, with his eyes fixed on the distant horizon, when one of the men, who had been digging out a rugged arm of the root from a little hollow into which the dead leaves had drifted, tossed some glittering object away with the leaves upon his spade, and uttered a cry of surprise, as he stooped to pick it up.

"Why, what's this here?" he exclaimed, turning it over in his broad hand. "A gold brooch!"

It was not a brooch, but a large oval locket. Richard Redmayne roused himself from his reverie to see what this stir was about; and at sight of that golden toy broke out with a loud oath, that startled the men more than the finding of the treasure.

"It's Grace's locket," he cried; "the locket my daughter lost three years ago! See if there isn't a bunch of blue flowers painted inside."

He had heard the history of the locket from Mrs. James, and

had forgotten no detail of the one gift which the fatal stranger had sent his child.

"It's uncommon hard to open," said the man, operating upon the trinket with his clumsy thumb. "Yes, here's the blue flowers, sure enough, and I suppose there ain't no doubt about the locket being your property, sir, so here it is."

"And here's a sovereign for you and your mate," replied Richard Redmayne, tossing the coin into the man's hand.

He took the locket, and sat for some time looking at it thoughtfully as it lay in the palm of his hand—poor relic of the dead. She had worn it round her neck every day, Mrs. James had told him; had loved it for the sake of the treacherous giver. "I ought to have thought of hunting for it about here," he said to himself, "knowing she was fond of sitting under the beech. I suppose it dropped from her ribbon and fell into the hollow, and so got buried among the dead leaves. And she grieved for the loss of it. Hannah told me. Poor child, poor child; she was no more than a child to be tempted by such toys."

He put the trinket into his pocket, and walked slowly homewards; and from that time forward he carried it about him, with his keys and loose money, in an indiscriminate heap. The spring, which was made to defy the eye of jealousy, was not proof against this rough usage, and became loosened from constant friction. Thus it happened that, when Mr. Redmayne dropped the locket one day, the false back flew open, and the miniature stood revealed.

He swooped upon it as a kite upon its prey. Yes, this was the face he had heard of; but how much handsomer and younger than Mrs. James's description had led him to suppose! He sat for an hour gazing at it, and thinking of the time when he should come face to face with its owner, should look into the eyes of the living man as he now looked into the eyes of the picture. Nemesis had put this portrait in his way.

"It'll be hard if I don't find him now," he said to himself.

He went up to London, took the miniature to a photographer, and had it copied carefully, painted in as finished a manner as the original; and this copy he gave to Mr. Kendel, the private inquirer.

"You told me you could do something if you had a picture of the man I want to find," he said; "and here is his miniature."

"An uncommonly good-looking fellow," remarked Mr. Kendel, as he examined the photograph. "I'll do my best, of course, Mr. Redmayne, and the portrait may be of some use; but if I were you, I wouldn't build too much on finding the man."

CHAPTER XXX.

"LOOK BACK! A THOUGHT WHICH BORDERS ON DESPAIR."

THE London season waned, and Mr. and Mrs. Walgrave Harcross went on a duty visit to Mr. Vallory, at the villa in the Isle of Wight; not an unpleasant abiding-place after the perpetual streets and squares, with their dingy foliage and smoky skies. They had the *Arion*, on board which smart craft Mr. Harcross could lie under an awning and read metaphysics, without giving himself much trouble to follow the propositions of his author; while Augusta talked society talk with the bosom friend of the moment. Of course they came to Ryde when the place was fullest, and it was only a migration from a larger heaven of Dinners and At Homes to a smaller, with slight variations and amendments in the way of yachting and picknicking.

Weston was with them. He was now much too useful a person to be neglected by his uncle; he had indeed become, by his inexhaustible industry and undeviating watchfulness, the very life and soul of the firm in Old Jewry. There was still a tradition that in affairs of magnitude Mr. Vallory's voice was as the voice of Delphi; but Mr. Vallory indulged his gout a good deal, gave his fine mind not a little to the science of dining; and the rising generation of City men were tolerably satisfied with the counsels and services of Weston. He was less inclined to formality than the seniors of Harcross and Vallory had been; brought his own mind to bear upon a case at a moment's notice; would take up his pen and dash off the very letter in the vain endeavour to compose which a client had been racking his brain by day and night for a week. He leaned less on counsel's opinion than the firm had been wont to lean; and indeed did not scruple to profess a good-humoured contempt for the gentlemen of the long robe. The business widened under his fostering care; he was always to be found; and his ante-chamber, a spacious room where a couple of clerks worked all day at two huge copying machines, damping, pressing, drying the autograph epistles of the chief, was usually full of busy men eating their hearts out in the agony of waiting. He was free of access to all, and there was now much less of that winnowing in the sieve of Messrs. Brown, Jones, and Robinson, articulated clerks, or junior partners. So great was Mr. Weston Vallory's power of dispatching business, so rapid his comprehension of every legal entangle-

ment, every undeveloped yearning of the client's mind, that the junior partners found themselves reduced for the most part to drawing up small agreements, filling-in contracts that Weston had skeletoned, writing insignificant letters, and such small details. Weston held the business in the palm of his hand, and yet he was able to attend his cousin's "at homes," and escort her to classical matinées when Hubert Harcross was too busy. A man at his club asked him one day if he ever went to bed, to which Weston replied blandly, "sometimes, in the long vacation."

He was at Ryde now, neat and dapper, with a freshness of complexion and general youthfulness of aspect, which many an idle young patrician, a stranger to intellectual labour and City smoke, might have envied.

"I don't know how you do it, Weston," Mr. Harcross said to him, one wet afternoon when they were weatherbound in the pretty drawing-room which looked across a sloping lawn to the sea. "You must have some elixir, I think. Do you drink the blood of innocent young children, or do you wrap yourself in the skin of a newly-flayed ape occasionally, or by what other mediæval nostrum do you preserve that Hylas-like appearance of yours?"

"Do you really think I'm looking well?" inquired Weston, with his placid smile. "My specific is of the simplest order, I assure you. I don't gorge myself as some men do. I never drink any wine but Amontillado. I lunch on a biscuit and a bottle of soda-water. I have my clothes made by the best men in London, and I make a point of taking life easily. I am like that citizen of London, who got out of bed one night when half the streets of the city were being consumed in a general conflagration, and after ascertaining that the fire must burn three hours before it reached him, went quietly back to his roost and finished his night's rest. I never anticipate trouble, and it must come home to me before I concern myself about it."

"Would to God that I were master of your admirable philosophy!" said Mr. Harcross, with one of those little bursts of passion which sometimes set his wife wondering.

She looked up at him now from the pages of the last volume of fashionable literature, with astonished eyes.

"I hope your life is not so very disagreeable that you need to be sustained by philosophy, Hubert," she said in her coldest tones.

"My dear Augusta, what can be better than my life? and is it not the very existence that any sensible man would choose for himself? A little heaven here below, which many a man dreams of for years, labouring unavailingly, and never enters. How thankful, then, should I be for the magic pass which has admitted me within the gates of that earthly paradise! But,

you see, there are clouds on the sunniest day, and I have my hours of shadow."

"You certainly have not the gift of high spirits," replied Augusta, "excepting in society."

"Can a bottle of champagne go on effervescing for ever?" asked Mr. Harcross: "you may goad it into a factitious sparkle with a sippet of bread, but what flat stuff it is after that transient resuscitation! Society asks too much of a man. He is perpetually being uncorked, perpetually called upon to sparkle, whereby his domestic condition becomes flatness. If you would let me take you through Spain this year, now, Augusta, you would find me the liveliest of companions. I am well posted up in all the Spanish pictures, and we should be away from the people you call your set. You can't imagine how I should revive under the genial influence of solitude; or if you would like a short sea voyage, we would go to St. Michael's and see the oranges growing."

"What preposterous propositions, Hubert! You have heard a hundred times that there is not an hotel in Spain fit for a lady to enter. Don't you remember that story of the innkeeper, who was also a cobbler by trade, and who made an omelet in his dirty leather apron? Imagine my having to eat omelets made in leather aprons! Besides, you know very well that I have promised to go to the Clevedons on the fifteenth of August. Sir Francis Clevedon's birthday is the twenty-ninth; and there is to be a luncheon in the park, and a ball in the evening, and a fête for the tenantry and poor people, and so on."

"A failure, no doubt," said Mr. Harcross in his dreariest way; "those elaborate inventions, those bringing together of gentle and simple, a double debt contrived to pay, always result in a fiasco. Cannot Sir Francis keep his birthday—the idea of a man keeping his birthday!—without our assistance? I don't care about going to Clevedon."

"I cannot understand what mysterious objection you can have to this visit," explained Mrs. Harcross with evident displeasure. "One would really suppose you had some association with the neighbourhood—either so pleasant that you do not care to revisit the place under altered circumstances, or so painful that you cannot endure to renew your acquaintance with it."

Mr. Harcross frowned, and glanced at Weston, wondering whether this hint of suspicion arose from any suggestion of his.

"I have no mysterious objection to Clevedon," he said; "and of course if you make such a point of it, I shall go. I have never refused any request of yours that I had the power to comply with. But I tell you again that I hate other people's houses. When I have a holiday—and heaven knows my holidays are few and far apart—I like to live my own life, not to be

awakened at half-past seven in the morning by the bruit of somebody else's gong, nor to find my host swelling with a sense of outrage because I was not down in time to hear him read family prayers. When the season is over, I languish for scenes remote from West-end man. I should like to take you to Algeria, and scrape acquaintance with the Moors. I should like to charter a ship and sail away to the Arctic seas, if there were time enough for such a voyage. Anything rather than Belgravia, and Tyburnia, and Kensingtonia out of town."

"I am sorry that the duties of civilized existence will not permit us to go to the North Pole," replied Mrs. Harcross, with a little scornful laugh; "but, you see, if you do not value friendship, I do, and I should be very sorry to disappoint Georgie Clevedon. Poor child! it is such a new thing for her to be mistress of a great house like Clevedon, and I have promised to give her a good deal of advice about the management of her household."

"What! Do you know anything about that science?" asked Hubert incredulously. "Have you ever stooped to such petty details? I thought Fluman and Mrs. Candy managed everything."

"How stupid you are, Hubert! Of course I am not my own housekeeper, if that's what you mean. I never interfered with anything of that kind in my life; no woman dare do it who hopes to hold any position in society. Imagine one's mind being distracted by a question of dinner. With papa, I made it a point never to find fault with a servant. If they did not suit, they were dismissed; and the housekeeper had full authority. 'I never question anything you do,' I said; 'and in return you must never disturb me by so much as a hint of household annoyances.'"

"In that case, would it not be better to send Mrs. Candy to Clevedon? She would be best able to advise Lady Clevedon."

"You surely don't suppose that Georgina Clevedon wishes to be advised about soups or jellies, or housemaids' wages, or soap and candles. I am going to put her in the way of taking her position in the county."

"But, my dear, do you know anything about counties?"

"I know society," replied Augusta with dignity. "Society in Kent is the same thing as society in Mastodon-crescent."

"Unhappily, yes," cried Mr. Harcross with a faint groan. "It was said that the printing-press had driven away Robin Good-fellow and the fairies: and I fancy that the railway system has, in the same manner, banished all individuality. There is no such thing as a country gentleman. If Sir Roger de Coverley were alive now, who would not rejoice to visit him? And there would be some fun in spending a week with Squire Western: the fellow was at least racy."

"Then I am to understand that you will go with me to Clevedon, I suppose," said Augusta, after a pause, during which she had returned to her book, and Mr. Harcross to the contemplation of the raindrops chasing one another down the plate-glass window, or the leaden sea beyond. Weston stood with his back to the chimneypiece, pretending to read the *Times*. This discussion about Clevedon was particularly interesting to him, and he became more and more inclined to think that Mr. Walgrave's visit to the Kentish farmhouse was associated with some episode worth his knowing.

"I will go, of course, if you really wish me to go. It cannot signify very much where I spend the last weeks in August."

"We need not stay longer than a fortnight at most," said Mrs. Harcross graciously, evidently softened by this concession. "And then, if you really care about the Continent, I shall be happy to go anywhere you please."

"Even to the North Pole," Mr. Harcross observed with a smile. "We could hardly be a colder couple if we spent our lives there," he said to himself afterwards.

"Weston is invited," continued Mrs. Harcross,—"Sir Francis asked him when they met in the square. Papa was asked too, but, with his gout, he prefers remaining quietly here. I don't think there'll be a very large party staying in the house, for Sir Francis has few old friends in England, and of course Georgie does not wish to crowd the house with her people."

It was settled, therefore, that Hubert Harcross should visit Clevedon; should eat, drink, and be merry in the place where he had spent that one idly happy summer day—in a place that was associated with the dead. He thought of the room with the oriel window, the room where he had told Grace Redmayne his fatal secret, where he had held her in his arms for the first time. He wondered how that room would look—changed or the same—and how he should feel when he looked upon it.

For a long time after that hideous November day, when she sank dead at his feet, he had lived in constant apprehension of some encounter with Grace Redmayne's kindred. But nothing had come of this dread except a visit from John Wort, who had accused him straightly enough of having tempted the girl away, and to whom he had deliberately lied. So, little by little, his fears had worn themselves out. He had heard of the migration of Mrs. James and her family, heard that the old farmhouse was tenantless, and believed himself tolerably secure from the evil consequences of his sin. But notwithstanding his sense of security, nothing could have been more repellent to him than the idea of this visit. It was only from the fear of awakening suspicion in the mind of his wife that he consented to go. Had he been asked what it was he dreaded, or why he, who was not a

man prone to sentimentality, should so shrink from looking once more on that familiar scene, his explanation must have been of the vaguest. He only knew that he did shrink from this visit, and that it was against his own judgment he consented to go to Clevedon.

"If there is any danger for me in that neighbourhood—danger of scandal or unpleasantness of any kind—I am running into the teeth of it," he said to himself; "but I hardly think there can be. The whole family are in Australia, and Brierwood farmhouse is shut up. Poor old house, where I first learnt that my heart was something more than a force-pump to assist the circulation of the blood. Poor old garden, where I was so foolishly happy."

CHAPTER XXXI.

HUSBANDS AND WIVES.

SIR FRANCIS and Lady Clevedon left the Swiss mountains and valleys early in August, and came to their Kentish home, desperately in love with each other, and altogether a most foolishly devoted couple, as Sibyl Clevedon informed them after a day or two spent in their society.

"You really do flirt abominably," she said, "and I don't think I shall be able to stand it, if things are always to go on in this way. My existence here will be a perpetual state of doing gooseberry. Don't you think you might find some eligible person to fall in love with me, Frank: so that I may set up a rival business? The present state of affairs is awfully slow."

Not slow for the principals, however, to whom life just now seemed a summer holiday. The young couple certainly made the most of that happy week of perfect liberty which preceded the arrival of their visitors. They wandered in the park all through the sultry summer morning, exploring their territory like a married Robinson Crusoe and his wife, "running about," as Percy Shelley's wife called it, when she spoke of herself and her boy-husband in their Welsh cottage. They rode about the surrounding villages, made themselves familiar with the boundaries of the estate, and formed the acquaintance of numerous small tenants and farm labourers, all of whom wanted something done, and took advantage of Sir Francis Clevedon's defenceless state in a ruthless manner. John Wort rated his master soundly for such folly.

"If you go giving 'em everything they ask," he said, "you may as well divide your estate among 'em at once, and go and

be a Plymouth Brother. It'll come to the same thing; for I'm blest if ever you'll get sixpence a year out of the property, if you listen to your tenants' whims and fancies. I never give 'em anything; that's my rule. 'Don't you like the place?' I ask, if they come whining to me. 'Because if you don't, you've got your remedy next quarter-day. There isn't an acre of land or a house on the estate that I couldn't let over your heads three deep; so if you want to better yourselves in some other direction, pray don't stop out of politeness to me.' That generally brings them to their senses. But of course, if the proprietor goes tampering with the tenants, I'm done. Once give 'em anything, and they'll never leave off asking; and if you begin by giving inches, you'll find yourself let in for ells before you know where you are."

Sir Francis looked penitent, and referred to a dainty little notebook of Georgie's with a gruesome countenance.

"I'm afraid I committed myself to a new chimney or two, and a little improvement in the way of drain pipes, where I found the cottages hardly as sweet as Breidenbach's shop; and here's a case where I think something inexpensive in the shape of a stable would be an actual charity, for the family have a donkey which lives with them in their common sitting-room—uncomfortable for the donkey, which must find himself hustled about when the family are busy, and perhaps a check on the freedom of conversation; for who can tell what a donkey may or may not understand? My wife pleaded piteously for the brute. I'm afraid her compassion went to the donkey rather than to the family who were compelled to have him in their parlour. Here's an oven, I see, to which I certainly did pledge myself, at the request of a woman whose cottage was a perfect model of cleanliness. And if she had an oven she could give her old man a bit of pie for his supper, or a toad-in-the-hole for his dinner. What is a toad-in-the-hole, by-the-bye? I've heard of viper broth being given by the Italians to people in extremity, but a toad is a new idea. Come, Wort, be philanthropic, and redeem all my promises without any more grumbling. I daresay I've been a fool, but you see a man does not get married many times in his life, and may be excused a little weakness on such an occasion."

"Of course, if you say I'm to do these things, Sir Francis, I must do them," replied John Wort, with the sigh of resignation. "It isn't my place to make objections. I suppose you know that you've let yourself in for a couple of hundred pounds, at the least."

"We'll save the money somehow, Wort, depend upon it," answered the delinquent gaily. "You have no idea what a financier I am. Lady Clevedon and I were planning a Swiss

cottage in the loveliest corner of the park to-day—a sequestered nook where we might spend our afternoons when we wanted to be alone, in order that our servants might tell people we were not at home without outraging their own moral sense. We'll defer the building of our Swiss cottage, and that will balance matters."

"This here feet-shampeter will cost no end of money, I reckon," observed the unappeasable steward, who, conscious of having made the shipwrecked estate sea-worthy by his own exertions, was inclined to consider that he had a prescriptive right to grumble.

"O, dear no; it will be the simplest thing in the world. Besides, that's out of your jurisdiction, you know, Wort; a mere domestic expense."

"I know that, Sir Francis. I know there ain't many masters as would let me speak that free as I do to you. But, you see, I've worked hard for the property, and it's almost as near and dear to me as if it was an only child; and I don't want to see you ruin yourself, as Sir Lucas did. Shampeters was in his line, you know, sir."

"Don't alarm yourself, Wort, I've graduated in the science of economy. Remember what I lived on abroad. And you don't know what a treasure of a wife I have secured. There'll be no extravagance in this household, depend upon it. O, by the way, Wort, if you're not in a hurry this morning, I should like to ask you a question."

"My time is your time, Sir Francis."

"Sit down, then, and make yourself comfortable. I'll ring for some sherry and soda. I've been looking over the maps of the estate, and the family history, intermarriages of great-uncles and great-aunts, ramifications of cousins, and so on; and I find there's a small estate my father got rid of about seven years before I was born, a place I never heard of in my life, called Ravenhurst. It seems to have been a farm of about three hundred acres, with a house of some importance upon it. I wonder I never heard my father speak of it."

"I don't," said Mr. Wort decisively.

"But why not?"

"Does a man ever care to talk about a thing he has parted with?" asked the steward philosophically, as he removed the wire from a soda-water bottle. "It's always a sore subject."

"But how did my father come to sell this Ravenhurst estate?" inquired Sir Francis. "Wasn't it in the entail?"

"No, sir; it was your grandmother's property. She was an heiress, you know, a Miss Blandford, only daughter of Colonel Blandford, who made no end of money in the *Canarie*—what ever that may be—and bought a good deal of land hereabouts."

"Humph! Curious I should never have heard of the estate. My father's difficulties had begun, I suppose, when he sold it?"

"Well, yes, sir. He didn't sell it without a strong necessity."

"And did his creditors get all the money?"

"Not the common run of his creditors," replied Mr. Wort, who had a thoughtful air, and seemed indisposed to be communicative. "They didn't touch a penny. It was a debt of honour, which Sir Lucas settled with the price of Ravenhurst."

"Ah, that fatal play! Fox, and that card-playing set, who made it the fashion for a man to ruin himself, had a great deal to answer for. Who bought the estate?"

"A Mr. Quinlan, a gentleman farmer, whose property it joined; but the land was sold again at his death. Ravenhurst has been through other hands since Sir Lucas sold it; seven-and-thirty years ago, you see, sir. It belongs to a retired builder now, who has divided it into three small farms, and sold the frontages for building ground."

Sir Francis was satisfied. It was strange, certainly, that his father had never mentioned Ravenhurst, and yet like his father to have avoided an unpleasant topic. He put the subject out of his mind. Ravenhurst was gone from him and his heirs for ever. He had not the insatiable hunger for land which possesses some men. It was hard upon the poor old Colonel, who had fought, and possibly plundered, in the Carnatic, that his estate should have been thus lightly disposed of, but it was scarcely a hardship for Sir Francis.

That idle happy week with his young wife seemed the briefest of his existence: one long ride through shawdowy woods and sunny green lanes, where the hedges were full of flowers; one lazy morning, dreaming under the chesnuts in the park; one tranquil evening, made musical by two sweet girlish voices blended in old familiar melodies such as the heart of man loveth.

They spent the peaceful evenings of this initiatory week in Georgie's morning room, that very chamber with the oriel window in which Grace Redmayne's girlish form had first been folded in a lover's arms, that room which in Hubert Walgrave's memory held a place as solemn as a mortuary chapel. The furniture had not been changed; the old Indian cabinets—Bombay blackwood—and Poonah desks and card-racks, which had been good enough for Colonel Blandford's daughter, the heiress of spoils from the Carnatic, were good enough for Georgie. A new Persian carpet, with new blue silk window-curtains, and blue silk covers for the antiquated chairs and sofas; a dainty maple-wood cottage piano in a snug recess by the fireplace; a huge cage of Australian birds, and a prettily carved ivory frame, containing all the photographic portraits that had ever been taken of Francis Clevedon—from the boy at a German University to the Master of Clevedon

Park: such trifles as these had sufficed to make the room perfect in the eyes of Georgie.

The 15th of August—the day on which their guests were to arrive—came too swiftly for the wedded lovers.

“Frankie, do you know I’m afraid I hate visitors?” Georgie said, with a solemn face expressive of profound self-abasement, as she stood by her husband’s side at an open window in the square parlour in the early summer morning.

“What a horrible confession for the head of a county family! And yet you were anxious that Mrs. Harcross should come to you, Georgie.”

“Was I, Frank? Mrs. Harcross! Well, you know, Mrs. Harcross was very good to me about my trousseau. You’ve no idea what trouble she took. But for her you might have had such a dowdy wife. She said aunt Chowder’s notions were a quarter of a century old.”

“I don’t think it would have disturbed my peace of mind very much, Georgie, if that calamity had occurred. I should love you just as well if you had only one faded gown—like Enid. Indeed, I have serious thoughts of putting you to the test, as that young lady was tested; or taking a leaf out of the *Decameron*, and making a modern Grisél of you. I wonder how you would come through that kind of furnace.”

“You can’t say I’m wanting in fortitude, Frank, when I parted with Pedro for your sake. But don’t let’s be silly, please. I want to talk very seriously.”

“I am all attention.”

“No, you’re not, sir; you’re staring out of the window with all your might.”

“Look at the shadows of the chestnuts, Georgie, and that group of deer; don’t you think those are worth staring at?”

“Yes, of course: but I want you to talk of the people who are coming to-day. First and foremost, there is aunt Chowder. I had a tremendous discussion about the rooms with Mrs. Mixer, and I really thought we never should settle things so as not to offend any one. Aunt Chowder is to have the yellow room, with the little dressing-room, which by rights belongs to the blue-room; but that we give to a bachelor—Mr. Weston Vallory—and he can do without a dressing-room.”

“Weston Vallory!” exclaimed Sir Francis, with a wry face. “Did we ask that snob?”

“Why, Frank, you know you invited him yourself!”

“I know nothing about it, my dear. A man who is going to be married may be expected to be a little off his head. I suppose I did ask the fellow in some expansive moment.”

“Don’t you like him, dear?”

“Do I like cobras, or skunks, or musk-rats, or any other

unclean things? I should think Weston Vallory was of the musk-rat species; and that if he ran across the bottles in my cellar, he'd poison the wine inside them: *ca sent le snob*."

"How can you be so unjust, Frank? Mrs. Harcross told me that her cousin is a most good-natured man. He is quite devoted to her."

"Yes; and hates her husband with all the venom of a small nature. I tell you, Georgie, Weston Vallory belongs to the venomous tribes. I was a fool to invite the two men together. However, I suppose in good society one must have people who hate each other. Go on with your list, my dear."

"The tapestry-room for the Harcrosses," said Georgie, counting on her fingers; "the room the prince slept in for General Cheviot and his wife; the oak room for your friend Captain Hardwood; the cedar room for my friends the Miss Stalmans; and one of the best rooms on the top story for your learned friend Mr. M'Gall, the Scotchman who writes for all the reviews. I think that's all. Papa is to be with us every day; but he won't sleep away from the Bungalow, you know, if he can possibly help it, for fear there should be a fire in the night, and all the animals should be burnt."

"Like Barnum's Museum," said Sir Francis irreverently.

Although Georgie was inclined to lament the advent of her visitors, it was by no means an unpleasant thing to receive them, and to feel the full force of her position as mistress of Clevedon brought home to her by their presence. She did the honours of the old house nobly, escorted her lady guests through the rooms and galleries, showing them the various points of attraction—the family pictures, the music-room with the new concert-grand, the billiard-room with its two vast tables, the spacious library, sustained in the centre by three massive porphyry columns—a room which had been added by Sir Lucas Clevedon's father. Mr. and Mrs. Harcross were the last to arrive. Their luggage had come down by an early train with the ruck of the visitors, three monster trunks that might have held an Indian outfit, with Mrs. Harcross's name and London address engraved upon a brass plate on each, and a modest portmanteau or two belonging to Mr. Harcross. Tullion had brought these and the inevitable travelling-bag, now more gorgeous than of old, being in fact a wedding present, silver-gilt tops to all the jars and bottles, with Mrs. Harcross's monogram in pink coral on everything, from the scent-bottles to the hair-brushes. The Harcrosses themselves came by an express that brought them to Tunbridge late in the afternoon; so that Weston Vallory had been installed some time, and was making himself agreeable at a five-o'clock tea in the garden when his cousin and her husband arrived.

Augusta insisted on going to her friend at once when she heard that Lady Clevedon was in the garden. She was not a person whose toilet was ever disordered by travelling, and all the puffings and flouncings of her gray silk dress seemed as fresh as when they left the hands of her milliner. So, conscious of her fitness to meet the gaze of society, she begged to be shown at once to the garden, and followed the butler across a great hall and along a passage leading to the garden door, with Hubert Harcross in her train.

The oak-pannelled passage was just a little dark, and a flood of summer sunlight streamed in at the opening of the door. Was it this sudden burst of light that dazed Mr. Harcross, as he stood in the threshold of the house for a moment, looking out at the garden?

It was the garden in which Grace and he had wandered all through that thoughtless summer afternoon. How well he remembered it! The arches garlanded with roses and honeysuckle, the passion-flowers, the stone basin of gold fish, where no fish had been when he last saw it, only shallow stagnant water covered with duck-weed. Poor old neglected place! They had trimmed and improved everything, of course, but not with an inexorable hand. The garden still belonged to the old world, the sweet-scented flowers still grew in a wild profusion; nor had the form of beds or grassplots been altered. In the midst of his pain, which was of the sharpest, he felt glad to see that the place was so little changed.

Lady Clevedon was pouring out tea in the very arbour where Mr. and Mrs. James Redmayne and Mr. Wort had sipped their milk punch with the old butler and his wife. There were a few garden seats scattered round the bower, and on one of these Weston Vallory was balancing himself, making himself agreeable after his kind. Sir Francis was absent, pleasantly engaged in showing the stables to his friend Captain Hardwood.

"What a magnificent woman!" said Mr. Mc'Gall, the gentleman who wrote for all the reviews, looking up from a meditative cup of tea, as Mrs. Harcross came along the gravel path, her glistening gray dress and dainty pink bonnet resplendent in the sunshine. "Is that one of your Kentish friends, Lady Clevedon?"

"No, that is my friend Mrs. Harcross."

"What! the wife of Harcross the barrister? I've met him once or twice. O, here he comes in the background, looking rather fagged. He's said to work as hard as any man in London."

Mr. Harcross performed his share of all the greetings; gave the ends of his fingers to Weston, was presented to General Cheviot, and so on, and said all that could have been expected

of him under the circumstances. But he looked wan and haggard in the sunshine, and was glad to drop into a chair by Georgie's tea-tray presently, after a little talk with the General.

"You look so tired, Mr. Harcross," Lady Clevedon said compassionately, thinking that her husband might come to look like this some day, worn and weary, and with an air of premature age; "I hope the journey was not very fatiguing."

"No. Augusta did not seem to feel it at all; but I suppose I am growing old and nervous, and that the vibration affects me more than it did a few years ago. I worked rather hard in the season, and since then I have been yachting a little; and I daresay that sort of thing, with a sixty-ton yacht on one's mind, is not so complete a rest as a professional man requires."

"I should think not," cried George; "and you have been at the Isle of Wight, yachting. How I envy you your yacht!"

"And how I envy you——"

"What, Mr. Harcross? What can such a successful man as you are find to envy in any one's fate?"

"A great many things. Your youth, to begin with, and the freshness that belongs to it—the power to envy anybody anything. Do you know, I sometimes look round the world, and wonder whether there is anything in it I should care to have if the mere act of wishing would secure it for me; and the answer is doubtful."

"That means that your life is so full already. You have fame, fortune, a charming wife. Is there anything more you could wish for?"

"Can't you imagine something? Children, for instance—you remember what Wordsworth says about a child? But I *don't* wish for those. I don't feel myself the sort of man who ought to have them."

He said all this carelessly enough, yet with a certain earnestness beneath that outward lightness. He had been drawn on to speak more unreservedly than his wont by something sympathetic in Georgie's face and manner. "She is the kind of woman a man might trust," he said to himself. "I like that firm mouth and rounded chin, which give such character to the sparkling face. I like the tone of her voice and the touch of her hand."

Mrs. Harcross had become the centre of a circle by this time: the elderly gray-bearded General prostrating himself in the dust before her, stricken down by her beauty; while his wife conversed apart with the eldest Miss Stalman, on the alarming tendencies of the English Church, undisturbed by the pangs of jealousy. The stable clock struck seven while the party were still pleasantly engaged, and the ladies moved off to dress for the eight o'clock dinner, leaving the gentlemen to contaminate

the first cool zephyrs of evening with the odour of premature cigars during the quarter of an hour which they could safely spare from the labours of the toilet.

The first dinner at Clevedon was a success. Cook and house-keeper, butler and subordinates, had nerved themselves for a grand struggle. Now or never the new establishment was to show what it was worth.

"Don't talk to me about your Regency dinners, Mr. Moles," the modern butler had said to his ancient brother, in the expansiveness of social intercourse. "What helegance or hartistical effect could there have been about a dinner in those days, when every blessed think was put upon the table?"

"I don't know about the table, Mr. Mumby," said the ancient butler, with an offended air; "Sir Lucas's platto was as fine a sight as you'd wish to lay your eyes on—fourteen feet long, with gadroon edges, and ramping lions for supporters at all the corners; and our silver covers and side-dishes took three men a week to clean before they come to the state of perfection as I liked to see. As for covers and side-dishes nowadays, with this mean sneaking way of handing everythink round, you might as well be without 'em, for all the credit they do you. I'm past my time, I dessay, Mr. Mumby, and I'm glad of it, when I see the present low-lived way of doing things. Why, one of our dinners would have made six of yours in solid butcher's meat; and where you've one side-dish in your menew, we had half-a-dozen."

"I don't know what you mean by side-dishes, Mr. Moles," said the modern domestic; "we have nothink but hongtrays and hongtraymays."

The inaugural dinner was a success. Tristram Moles was allowed to peep into the dining-room before the banquet, a wan feeble figure amid all that glow of colour and sparkle of glass under the soft light of waxen tapers. Pale as a ghost revisiting the scenes of its earthly joys, he gazed upon the glittering board with a faint approving smile, and confessed that it was nicely arranged.

"I never did hold with flowers on a dinner-table," he said, shaking his head at the pyramids of rare hothouse blossoms, and the dwarf forest of fern and geranium reflected in the crystal plateau; "but if you must have 'em, I allow you've arranged 'em tastily. It's all very pretty, Mr. Mumby, like a young lady's counter at a fancy fair; but I'm an old man, and I shall go down to my grave with the opinion that your top and bottom and your six side-dishes is the best decoration for your dinner-table." Thus, with a deprecating shrug and a mournful survey of the frivolous board, Mr. Moles having come like a shadow, so departed.

The dinner, as well as being a success from a gastronomic point of view—there was a parmesan soufflé towards the end of the feast, which the eldest Miss Stalman, who was gifted with an epicurean taste, dreamt of—was a social triumph. The hum and rattle of conversation never ceased; there were no awkward pauses, in which people simultaneously awake to the discovery that no one is talking, till the most audacious member of the circle plunges into the gulf of silence with some inane remark, which, being gratefully received by host and hostess, bridges the dreary chasm, and leads the way to pastures new. To-night at Clevedon there were plenty of good talkers. General Cheviot and Colonel Davenant helped and sustained each other, yet were judiciously placed far enough apart to have each his auditory. The two Miss Stalmans were of the agreeable-rattle species: could talk croquet or theology, fine art, horses or botany with equal facility; could draw out the dullest neighbour and entangle the coldest cavalier in the meshes of one of those confidential conversations about nothing particular, which, seen from a little distance, look like flirtation of the deepest dye.

In such a party, if Mr. Harcross had chosen to eat his dinner in comparative silence, he might have done so with impunity. There were plenty of people to talk; and Georgie's aunt Mrs. Chowder, whom he took in to dinner, was not exacting so long as the ministering spirits of the banquet brought her the nicest entrées, and not the ruined walls of the vol-au-vents, or the legs of the chickens. "I can't dine without currie," she told her neighbour confidentially, "and I can't dine without bitter beer. I know it sounds dreadful; but I was twenty years in India, and use is second nature, you know. I don't know whether you noticed it, but there was no grated cocoa-nut in that currie. I must give Georgina's cook poor dear Chowder's recipe; a copy of it, that is to say. The original document is in his own handwriting, and I keep it among the letters he wrote me when I came home for my health."

While Mrs. Chowder enjoyed her dinner, however, Mr. Harcross did not abandon himself to silence. On the contrary, he went in for a triumph and achieved it, saying some of his best and bitterest things, to the delight of an admiring circle, talking much more than usual; not hanging back, and watching his opportunity to flash in upon the talk with speech as keen as a sword-thrust, after the manner of some dinner-table wits, but making all the talk at his end of the table, and sustaining it with unabated vigour.

Weston Vallory, who was seated at Augusta's left hand, was not slow to observe this extreme vivacity.

"How lively your husband is to-night!" he said to Mrs. Harcross; "he has almost a feverish air."

"I suppose he wishes to make himself agreeable to *our* friends," Augusta answered, in her chilling way, but with a little suspicious glance across the table towards her husband nevertheless. "He is not generally dull in society," she added.

"O, dear no; on the contrary, he is a man who seems created to shine in society. It's a pity that type of man always seems to lose a little in the domestic circle."

Augusta flashed one of her sternest glances upon her cousin; but he was as much accustomed to the angry flash of those brilliant hazel eyes as she was to this kind of malicious insinuation against her husband.

"I don't know what you mean by losing in the domestic circle," she said stiffly; "I never find Hubert at a loss for conversation at home."

"Really now," said Weston, with his insolent incredulous air, "I should have thought that even Canning or Sydney Smith must have been rather bad company at home. A man of that kind wants such a dinner as this to develop his powers. Though, by-the-bye, there really is *no one* here, and that's why I felt surprised by Harcross's excessive vivacity. I can't see the source of his inspiration. What can it matter to him whether those girls in blue think him a wit or a dullard: or that old Indian General, or the stout party in green satin—an aunt of the house, I believe? What *kudos* can he get from amusing all these nobodies?"

"It is just possible that he may wish to please *my* friends," replied Augusta, with dignity. "You cannot suppose that a man in his position must always have a motive for being agreeable. He is not upon his promotion."

"No, he is one of those infernal lucky fellows who have only to open their mouths for manna to fall into them."

"He has worked harder than most men, and has more talent than most men, Weston. I don't see that there is any luck in the case."

"Don't you? Was there no luck in marrying you? What is there to distinguished him from the ruck of mankind, that should entitle him to such a prize as he secured when he won you? How provokingly devoted you are to the fellow, Augusta!"

"Weston, I will not allow you to talk in that style."

"O, come now, Augusta; I'm sure I behave myself remarkably well, but a man can't always be dumb. It provokes me past endurance sometimes to see you so fond of him."

"Indeed! I had supposed myself amongst the coldest of wives."

"Cold! Why, you blaze up like a volcano if one says a word against yonder demigod! He cannot do wrong in your sight."

Why, I verily believe that if any awkward episode of his past life were to come to light, you'd accept the revelation as a matter of course, and go on adoring him!"

"I really wish you would not use such absurd words, Weston—'demigod' and 'adoration'! Of course I am attached to my husband. Our marriage was one of inclination, as you know, and Hubert's conduct from first to last has been most conscientious and disinterested. With regard to his past life, I doubt if I have the slightest right to question that, although I should be naturally grieved to discover that he had ever been anything less than I believe him to be, a man of high moral character."

"Upon my word, Augusta, you are a model wife. But suppose now, during your engagement to him, at the very time, when you were keeping company, as the maid-servants say, there had been any little episode—a rustic flirtation, for instance, which developed into something of a more serious character—how then?"

This time Mrs. Harcross grew suddenly pale even to the very lips.

"I will never speak to you again, Weston," she said, without raising her voice in the least degree, "unless you immediately apologise for that shameful insinuation."

"My dear Augusta, I was only putting a case. I will beg your pardon a thousand times over, if you like. I had no idea of offending you."

"You always offend me when you talk of my husband. I request that for the future you will abstain from speaking of him."

"I expunge his name from my vocabulary. From this moment he shall be as sacred in my eyes as the Llama of Thibet, or those nameless goddesses whom the Greeks worshipped in fear and trembling. I could endure anything rather than your anger, Augusta."

"Then pray do not provoke it by any more silly speeches about Hubert. Lady Clevedon is rising; will you give me my fan, please? I dropped it just now. Thanks."

Her colour had come back by this time. That insinuation of Weston's was of course, like all the rest of his malicious speeches, the meaningless emanation of a jealous soul. She had grown accustomed to the idea that this cousin of hers should be thus bitter upon the subject of her marriage. He knew what a crushing disappointment that marriage had been to him, and was hardly inclined to be angry with him for being still devoted to her, heart and soul; still jealous of the winner. Where else, indeed, could she have found such faithful service, such unflagging zeal?

"Poor Weston," she used to say to her confidantes, "he would go through fire and water for me."

And through fire and water Weston Vallory was quite prepared to go, with one end and aim held steadily in view.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"ON PLEASURE BENT."

SUMMER skies and summer woods, quaint old gardens brimming over with roses, a fair supply of carriages and horses, a good cook, and a considerable proportion of youthful spirits, combined to make the little gathering at Clevedon a very pleasant business. There were plenty of show-places and a sprinkling of interesting ruins in that fair garden of England; and Lady Clevedon's visitors were rarely at home for luncheon, but were to be found at that social hour either picknicking on the smooth turf in the chancel of a dilapidated abbey, or roughing it in the sanded best parlour of some rustic inn, or camping on the summit of a hill, with a Turneresque landscape spreading wide beneath, and melting into the blue sky beyond an opposite range of wooded hills twenty miles away.

Sir Francis Clevedon's horses, and such job-horses as were to be hired in the village of Kingsbury, had rather a hard time of it during these festivities, and may reasonably have wished themselves in any other state of life. Little rest had they in the gloomy, substantial old stables, in the spacious quadrangle, where pear-trees and yellow jasmine climbed over the dark red-brick walls, and a great clock clanged the hours, half-hours, and quarters, with a dissonant clang that outraged the summer quiet. As soon as the cheery, lounging breakfast was over, the morning papers read, and perhaps a stray game of billiards indulged in, while the ladies were dressing for the day's excursion, preparations for the start began on the broad gravel drive in front of the porch. Matrons were duly stowed into landau and barouche; maidens came tripping down the stone steps in riding-gear, with chimney-pot hats perched coquettishly on wonderful structures of puffed and plaited hair; adventurous spirits eager to drive doubtful horses in tittuppy dog-carts, paused for the signal for departure; dogs barked, footmen and grooms ran too and fro, carrying shawls and sun umbrellas; ponderous baskets of comestibles were hung on to the heavier carriages; and at last, Georgie having mounted a mail Phaeton with her husband, in defiance of etiquette, the gay procession made merrily off at a dashing pace down the long avenue, whose

glories have been somewhat thinned by Sir Lucus, but which is still a noble alley.

"I will drive with you, Frankie," says the young wife, nestling under her husband's elbow. "What a tall creature you are up there! I would sooner stay at home at once than sit and prose in that stuffy landau, while you rattled on a quarter of a mile before us, smoking and ha-ha-ha-ing with some horrid man. How is it men are always laughing when they are together? and what in goodness' name do they find to laugh at? They must be either very witty or very idiotic."

"Not much of the first, I'm afraid, Georgie. Your wit never laughs, and doesn't often make other people laugh. His true province is to set them thinking. Of course I like to have you with me, Miss Crusoe" (this was a pet name, founded on his first remembrance of her), "but don't you think you ought to be doing company with Mrs. Cheviot and Mrs. Harcross in the landau?"

"They're very comfortable without me, Frankie," Georgina answers in a wheedling tone, getting a little closer to the driver's elbow. "Augusta can get on with any one, in her grand way, and there's auntie too; and they know we haven't been married long, dear, and perhaps they'll think it natural we should like to be together."

"And of course by and by, when we've been married a little longer, we shall wish to be as far apart as possible," replies Sir Francis, laughing; and away they go along the bright Kentish roads, where every hedgerow frames a new picture of sweet pastoral beauty, where every fresh turn of the road reveals a panorama that seems fairer than the last,—away they go by hill and valley, by woods and fields, as happy as the skylark carolling in the blue vault above them.

In all these agreeable excursions Mr. Harcross followed in his wife's train. He was never sulky or objective, never languished to stay behind to play billiards or read novels in the dim old library, or smoke perpetual cigars among the roses,—he was only supremely indifferent. The small world of Clevedon considered him a model husband. He was always polite and attentive to his wife when occasion called for politeness on his part, brought her shawls and parasols, handed her in and out of carriages, but all without any ill-advised *empressment* which might have reminded people that he had married a fortune. By fits and starts he chose to be brilliant, but at other times was the most silent of the party. People accepted the taciturn humour as natural in a professional man of his standing.

"That fellow Harcross does no end of hard thinking, Joe," one of the young men of the party observed to his compeer; "can't make out how he does it. Did you ever try to think, Joe?"

"Yes, once," answered Joseph gravely: "I tried to make a safe book for the Derby, and did a lot of thinking over it; but the figures wouldn't come right, and yet they ought. Now, look here, Treby; if you lay a hundred to ten against eleven horses, only one of the eleven can win, you know, and you can't lose anything. If none of 'em win, you make a hundred and ten pounds. That's the secret of the colossal fortunes made by omnibus cads, and that sort of people."

"Don't seem to see it," replied Treby; "I'd rather back the favourite for a place. It isn't such a strain on one's intellect."

Did Mr. Harcross enjoy life amidst that merry party, with all the verdure and freshness of English landscape about and around him, with young voices ringing in his ear, and young faces smiling on him? Well, no; he rather suffered these pleasures as something that must be got through and endured somehow. Half the time his mind was away in dusty law courts, or in the Lords committee-room. He could not enjoy the present moment as these people did. That breathless race which he had run for fortune had incapacitated him for holiday-making. It seemed such a foolish waste of time, this dawdling among broken arches, and champagne-drinking at two o'clock in the day, the trivial jokes, the flirtation, and meandering. While the rest were beguiled by such pettiness, he strolled thoughtfully over the gravestones of mitred abbots, weighing his own life, pondering upon what he had won and what he had missed. The ruined abbey, whose aisle he paced, was somewhat suggestive of such contemplation; for it belonged to a law-lord, whose mansion stood a little way off, within sight of those ivy-covered buttresses.

"The monks who built and maintained this place seem a grander race than our law-lords," he said to himself, "for they have left a finer monument to mark their existence than Thurlow or Brougham. After all, there is nothing like architecture if a man wants to be remembered when he is dust; and that was a pardonable weakness of the Pharaohs which made them go in for incalculable bricks and mortar."

There were times, however, when Mr. Harcross was more socially inclined, and would even condescend to flirt a little, in a half-cynical way, with the prettiest Miss Stalman, who was disposed to adore him, and in little gushes of confidence to her sister deplored the fact of his marriage. In spite of his habit of retiring within himself occasionally, and withdrawing from the pleasures of the rest, he was eminently popular. First and foremost, because he was a man of mark in his profession, and people liked to be on such intimate terms with so distinguished a person; and secondly, because he talked well when he did

choose to talk, and had the gift of at least seeming to know everything under the sun.

"You are so dreadfully clever, Mr. Harcross," said the pretty Miss Stalman, with a reverential look, after he had told her some legends of the monks who had tossed their censers and sung their masses under the vaulted roof that once had spanned those lofty walls. "I think you must have read every book that was ever printed."

"Not quite. Indeed I doubt if I have read as many books as you have. I am told that some young ladies devour a three-volume novel in a day, and that, knocking off Sundays and an occasional saint's day, would make nine hundred volumes a year. Allow them seven years of novel reading, and there you have six thousand three hundred volumes. I don't believe I've read so many as that. But I thought, as we were to lunch in the cloisters, every one would be eager to know something about the abbey; so I looked it up in the history of Kent while you ladies were dressing."

"It is so nice to be with some one who knows all about gothic architecture," murmured Miss Stalman, with a faint sigh. "My sympathies are with everything mediæval."

Several people at Clevedon had observed the likeness between Mr. Harcross and his host. They might have been brothers or first-cousins, people said, and were more like each other than many men so related. Hubert Harcross's type of face was to be seen in ever so many of the Clevedon portraits, as Weston Vallory, the all-seeing, pointed out one wet morning when the visitors were confined to the house, and tramped the galleries restlessly in their search for amusement.

"It's really a singular fact, that likeness," he said; "especially as my friend Harcross's face is by no means a common one. There's that slight projection of the under lip, for instance, which gives what some people call a cynical expression to the mouth—that's a regular Clevedon mark. You see it in the chief-justice yonder, with the Ramilies wig, and in the old colonel of dragoons over there. Very curious, these accidental resemblances."

There was a full-length portrait of Sir Lucas in the drawing-room, by Lawrence—rather an effeminate figure, in the famous Regency swallow-tail coat and high stock—and in this picture also the likeness between the Clevedons and Mr. Harcross was obvious. All that made the strength of Hubert's face was wanting in the spendthrift's thoughtless countenance; but the likeness was not the less palpable.

"You are like what my father would have been if he had ever learned to think," said Sir Francis; "but he never did. Even misfortune could not teach him that lesson. He only acquired the art of grumbling."

"Ye shall know them by their fruits," said Mr. Harcross sententiously. "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"

Sir Francis looked at him wonderingly for a moment, but said nothing; whereupon somebody began to criticise the fashionable attire of the year '20, and the conversation drifted into another channel.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"AND ONE WITH YOU I COULD NOT BE."

MR. HARCROSS was alone in the picture gallery that rainy August afternoon. There was a grand billiard match going on downstairs, a fight for the championship of Clevedon, between Captain Hardwood and Mr. M'Gall, the Scottish reviewer, and all the youth and sprightliness of Clevedon, made sprightlier by a luncheon which had been prolonged to double its usual length on account of the dismal weather, was assembled to witness the struggle. Mr. Harcross could hear the babble and laughter as he paced the long gallery, from whose panelled wall departed Clevedons seemed to scowl upon him in the doubtful light. There had been a talk of the day improving after luncheon, and barometers had been tapped inquiringly by dainty knuckles; but the dense gray sky had grown grayer and more leaden, and the steady rain of the morning had only become a little heavier in the afternoon. There was more wind now than there had been in the morning, and a stormy gust drove the rain against the windows every now and then, and the ancient sashes rattled like the ports of a ship at sea. The long picture gallery, cheerful enough on a sunny day, when the landscape outside the windows was a thing of beauty, looked somewhat blank and dismal this afternoon. There was a wide fireplace at each end of the room, with spindle-legged silver tongs and shovel chained to the wall of the chimneypiece: the stately apartment would have been all the better even on this August day for a couple of blazing fires. Mr. Harcross shivered once or twice during his monotonous promenade, but though there were plenty of cheerful rooms in the house, he chose to occupy this. He had borne the morning well enough—had played chess with Mrs. Cheviot, had flirted with the pretty Miss Stalman, had found some rare old volumes in the library, and produced and explained them for the edification of the elder and more intellectual Miss Stalman; had done all that a man could do, weather-bound in another

man's country-house, to maintain his popularity. But the afternoon had found him exhausted. His professional career had not adapted him for the endurance of ten hours' labour in this line. He required to be sustained by some keener interest than was to be found in this trifling kind of existence. He could find perpetual mental refreshment in his briefs, dull and commonplace as they might seem to an outsider. There was always some interesting technicality, some legal knot to be untied by his dexterous hand, some subtle pitfall to be planned for the opposite side. But in this company-life, this little colony of guests thrown together at random, like shipwrecked strangers on a desert island, pretending to be congenial and perpetually amused, he could find neither interest nor delight.

He was walking to and fro in a dreary way, letting his idle thoughts wander where they would, when the door at the end of the gallery opened and he heard the rustling of a silk dress. Perhaps no one else of his acquaintance ever wore such rich silk or such long trains as Augusta, or it may have been a mere fancy on his part; but he always imagined that her garments had a peculiar rustle, and he looked up now, startled by the familiar sound, to find that he had not been deceived. It was his wife who had opened the door.

She came towards him slowly, with a rigid look in her face, that hardly promised a pleasant encounter.

"The idea of your being here, Hubert, all by yourself!"

"Why should I not be here, Augusta, and by myself, for once in a way? Have I not been living in public long enough to satisfy even your views of one's duty to society? I'm rather glad to stretch my legs here, and think my own thoughts and do a little yawning. If you knew how often I've languished for a comfortable yawn lately!"

"What nonsense, Hubert!" Mrs. Harcross exclaimed, with vexation. "I've been looking for you all over the house. Every one else is in the billiard-room."

"Then I am sure I cannot be missed."

"O, yes, you are. Your friend the youngest Miss Stalman has been inquiring about you—'Mr. Harcross would be able to decide that;' 'Mr. Harcross would be so interested in this;' and so on. How I detest girls who are always going on about married men!"

"Has the youngest Miss Stalman that infirmity? Perhaps it has arisen from a dearth of single men; they do seem rather a scarce commodity. However, Miss Stalman can exist very well without me for an afternoon or so. I hope you haven't been dull, Augusta."

"I have not been particularly gay. I don't care about billiards, as you know; and I have looked through all the books in the last

box from London, and there is really nothing in them; and there seems no chance of our getting a drive before dinner."

"Not unless you defy the elements, my dear. Suppose you stop and have a walk with me—this is a capital room for an indoor constitutional; and we so seldom have any opportunity for confidential talk nowadays. Don't you think this kind of visiting is something like living under a glass case?"

"I do not find that we ever have much to say to each other when opportunity does favour us," Mrs. Harcross replied stiffly. "You appear to be much more eloquent in the society of Miss Lucy Stalman."

"Miss Stalman is not my wife," replied Mr. Harcross, with a careless shrug. "I am not obliged to be in earnest when I talk to her; I am only doing company. Besides, that kind of balderdash is my trade, and I may as well keep my hand in; it is the sort of stuff with which I beguile my adversaries and amuse my colleagues at Westminster. Come, Augusta," he said, seeing no sign of brightening in his wife's moody countenance, "you are not going to be jealous of Lucy Stalman, *par exemple*. I thought that kind of thing was quite out of your line."

"I suppose you thought it out of my line to care for you, or to feel your coldness," she answered bitterly.

"My dear Augusta, how unreasonable this is!" exclaimed Mr. Harcross, taken somewhat by surprise at this unwonted display of feeling. "Can you for a moment imagine that it has been any gratification to me to talk to that young woman, or that I take the faintest interest in her? I was obliged to do something—to put on a kind of spurious gaiety—to contribute my quota to the general clatter."

They had not begun their promenade, but were standing in the middle of the gallery, near a carved-oak buffet, on which there was a dusty collection of oriental china, cracked saucers, and Canton cups, which had been considered priceless gems of art in their day. Mr. Harcross stood idly fingering the fragile teacups, changing their positions as if he had been playing a game of thimble-rig with them. Mrs. Harcross walked away to one of the windows with a little impatient sigh, and stood looking out at the dim rain-blotted landscape.

"It is not that," she said presently, in a contemptuous tone. "You cannot suppose that I could be jealous of such a frivolous chit as Lucy Stalman. It is not that, Hubert; it is only——" She broke down suddenly with a choking sound that was like a stifled sob.

"Only what, my dear?" Mr. Harcross asked, tearing himself away from the teacups and going over to her. Her face was turned so resolutely towards the window that he could not see it without a greater effort than it was natural for him to make; he

could only lay his hand gently on her shoulder, and repeat his question in a somewhat graver tone.

There was no answer, but the choking sound was not repeated. Mrs. Harcross stood steady as a rock.

"What is the meaning of all this, Augusta? What is amiss between us?"

"What is amiss between us?" she repeated. "Do you need to be told that? Is it not sufficiently obvious to the dullest comprehension what is amiss between us? A trifle. Only that you have never loved me."

"Who has been putting this stuff into your head, Augusta?"

"My own reason. The knowledge began to dawn upon me a long time ago, even in London, where our lives were so busy, and we were hardly ever alone. It has become a little clearer to me, perhaps, in this house, where we have been thrown more together, and where I have had time to observe other married couples, and to see the difference between their union and ours."

"I suppose you mean Sir Francis and Lady Clevedon, who are only just out of their honeymoon, and are in the gushing stage. Unfortunately, you see, I cannot gush. If you expect that kind of thing from me, you will always have ground for complaint. In the first place, I am, I daresay, ten years older than Frank Clevedon; and, in the second place, I am built of a harder kind of wood. I don't break out into leaf and blossom as that sort of man does."

"I don't exact anything, Hubert," his wife answered gloomily. "I have only made a discovery. It is one that I have made by degrees; but I think it has come fully home to me in this house."

If she had hoped to wring protestations of affection from him by this upbraiding, if she had thought to extort some tender avowal by this complaint, she must needs have been sorely disappointed by the calm business-like tone of his reply.

"My dear Augusta," he began, with a manner that was at once kindly and serious, "I am the last man upon earth to argue such a point as this; indeed, it is not one that will admit of argument. Call domestic love into question, and it ceases to be. It is too delicate a blossom to bear rough handling. God knows I have tried to do my duty, have never knowingly thwarted a wish of yours, however trivial. So far from wishing to loosen the tie that binds us, I would gladly have it made closer. I wish we had children, my dear, and that our fine house was more like home. I wish society claimed rather less of your attention, and that you could sympathize more warmly with my pursuits and aspirations, small as they may be. Come, Augusta, let us leave matrimonial bickerings to sillier people than you and I. I told you this was an unlucky house for me to come to; do not make me too true a prophet."

"An unlucky house for you to come to!" echoed Augusta, turning to him with a sudden suspicion in her face. "No; you did not say that. You were only unwilling to come. What do you mean by this being an unlucky house?"

"Does it not seem in a fair way to prove so, when you begin a kind of upbraiding which I never heard from you before?"

"You are always talking in enigmas, Hubert, and I never knew any one from whom it was more difficult to get a straight answer. I want to know why you call this house unlucky."

"Are you very anxious for an answer?" he inquired, with a provoking coolness.

They were standing face to face by this time. He had not often seen his wife so much in earnest. He smiled at her eagerness with a somewhat wintry smile.

"I am very anxious."

"Then I will answer you in five words—Because it is not mine."

His wife looked at him for a few moments in utter silence, as if petrified by surprise.

"Because it is not yours, Hubert!" she repeated. "You call this house unlucky because it is not yours! Do you wish me to suppose that you are capable of so paltry a sentiment as envy; that you actually envy Sir Francis the possession of Clevedon?"

"Hardly that. Frank Clevedon is a good fellow enough, and I harbour no grudge against *him*. In point of fact, I rather like him. Yet were I disposed to be bitter, this place is very well calculated to inspire bitterness. I am only human, Augusta; status is the prize I have worked for, and you know how hard I have worked, and how little of what people call the pleasures of this life I have tasted. A man cannot serve two masters: my master has been Success, and I have served him well. Yet I think I would rather have the position that a good old name, supported by such an estate as this, gives a man than the best place I am ever likely to win at the Bar."

"That is quite possible," replied Augusta, rather contemptuously. "I might like very well to be a duchess; but if my most intimate friend happened to be one, I should not envy her her strawberry leaves."

"The cases are not parallel, my dear. There may be peculiar reasons why I should feel some touch of bitterness about Clevedon."

"Peculiar reasons! What reasons for bitterness can you possibly have in relation to a place that you never saw till ten days ago?"

"How do you know that I had not seen it before?"

"Because you did not say so."

"I might not care about talking of the place. You know that I did not like coming to it—that you brought me here against my will."

"I begin to think Weston was right, and that some association with your stay at Brierwood Farm made this visit painful to you!"

The dark stern face flushed, and then paled. In spite of the mastery which Mr. Harcross had acquired over his emotions, there were some home thrusts that made their mark.

"I was not thinking of my stay at Brierwood," he said, recovering himself promptly. "I had seen Clevedon before I saw Brierwood."

"How singularly uncommunicative you were upon the subject, then!" said Augusta in an offended tone. Never had she felt so angry with him; no, not even on the night of their first quarrel. It was a smouldering fire, which perhaps had been kindled then, and had been fanned into flame by Weston's insinuations.

"I tell you again it is not a subject I care about discussing. By the way, you mentioned Weston Vallory just now, in a manner which leads me to conclude that I am indebted to him for this afternoon's unexpected outbreak. Now, I am not given to threatening, but it is only fair to tell you that any interference of that kind, and from that quarter, is just the likeliest influence in the world to make a life-long breach between us. I know Mr. Weston Vallory by heart, and—tolerate him. But let me once see his finger in my domestic affairs, and it will be war to the knife between us. You would have to make your election between your husband and your cousin. It's hardly worth while prolonging a conversation that seems destined to be unpleasant," he added after a brief pause. "I'll go down to the billiard-room and see how the match is getting on."

He walked towards the door, but Augusta stopped him.

"You shall not leave me like that, Hubert," her voice tremulous, her breast heaving with suppressed passion. "What do I care for Weston Vallory? He is my first cousin, and he is useful and obliging; but you know that I do little more than—tolerate him. But I am not going to be put off in this way. I am determined to penetrate the secret of your dislike to this house. I don't think I have a jealous nature, but that there should be a secret between you and me is something more than I can bear. There is a woman at the bottom of this mystery, Hubert."

"What if I admit the fact?" said Mr. Harcross coolly.

"There *is* a woman concerned in your secret, then!" cried Augusta breathlessly.

"Yes. My secret, as you call it, concerns a woman who died thirty years ago, and that woman was my mother."

"Your mother!"

"Yes, Augusta. You have goaded me into this confession, as you surprised me into a former one. Heaven knows whether

it is best for both of us that I should be thus candid; whether we shall seem any nearer to each other when you know all that makes the brief and bitter story of my life; but since you make this business into a grievance, and seem to take the matter so deeply to heart, I may as well tell you everything there is to be told. Do you remember the night Sir Francis Clevedon dined at your father's house—the first time you saw him?"

"Perfectly," murmured Augusta, looking at him with a face full of wonder and vague expectancy. "But what can that have to do with your secret?"

"You remember that on that first meeting you were struck by the likeness between him and me, and since we have been here you have heard all these frivolous fools babbling about my resemblance to the Clevedon portraits."

"Of course I have heard them."

"And yet the fact has never suggested any idea, any suspicion? You have never so much as wondered whether there might not be a reason for so marked a likeness between two men, who are, to all appearance, strangers?"

"What reason could there be?" exclaimed Augusta, with a frightened look.

"That Francis Clevedon's father and mine were the same."

"What!" cried his wife, with unutterable horror. "You are the—illegitimate brother of the master of this house?"

"No; I will not take upon myself that stigma. I have no certain knowledge as to the legitimacy or illegitimacy of my birth. I only know that the man who blighted my mother's life was Sir Lucas Clevedon. I have told you before to-day that I could never discover whether he did or did not marry her. There was only one man likely to know the truth—that man was Lord Dartmoor, my father's most intimate friend, but he died and made no sign. All that I know is, that about a year before my mother's death, Sir Lucas, at Lord Dartmoor's instigation, sold an estate of some value, and settled the purchase-money upon my mother and me. Now I do not believe Sir Lucas Clevedon was the kind of man to make any such sacrifice without a motive, and that a motive stronger than a selfish man's love. It is quite possible there had been some sort of marriage abroad, and that this settlement was the price he paid for secrecy. Yet I hardly think if the ceremony had been valid—a marriage that would hold water in a law court—my mother would have sold my birthright. I love her too dearly to believe that she could be unjust to her child. I love her too dearly to believe that she was ever anything less than my father's wife."

"And you have never even thought of asserting your rights?" asked Augusta.

"Never. If I have rights, I have no evidence to prove them,

not so much as the certificate of my birth. Nor do I even know where I was born, nor by what name my wretched existence was recorded in the register of humanity. I am not the man to advance a claim I could not support, or wantonly to bring dishonour upon my mother's name by dragging the question of my birthright before the world. The settlement which my father made was sufficient to secure me a good education, and to keep me respectably while I waited for my first brief. I owe it to Lord Dartmoor that I began life at Harrow and Oxford. I owe it to Lord Dartmoor that I was not a shoeless pickpocket, sleeping under the dark arches in the Adelphi."

Augusta Harcross covered her face with her hands and shuddered visibly. She was a woman to whom this kind of thing, this doubtful birth, this possibility of naked feet and dark arches, was unspeakably horrible. To her, who had been nurtured in the luxurious lap of middle-class prosperity, the thoughts of these degrading circumstances were as glimpses of some nethermost gulf, too black and deep to be looked into. She covered her face involuntarily, as if by that gesture she would fain have shut out the full horror of the situation. That she should have married a man so situated seemed to her the bitterest shame that could have befallen her—a disgrace from which there could be no recovery. And she had chosen him as a man likely to achieve distinction for her—a man whose name it would be an honour to bear. Great heavens! what a revelation! Future ages would know of her as the wife of Sir Lucas Clevedon's illegitimate son. Such secrets may be hidden for the moment, but leak out in history.

"His brother!" she said at last. "Sir Lucas Clevedon's unacknowledged son! O, why did you ever bring me here?"

"It was you who insisted on my coming."

"Do you suppose that I would have come here if I had known this?" cried Mrs. Harcross indignantly. "The very name of the place would have been detestable to me."

"If it has become so now we can go away at once," replied Hubert quietly. "There is nothing to hinder us."

"And challenge suspicion by the very fact of our going! After all the talk about your likeness to these Clevedons, too! I daresay there are people who suspect already. It is too horrible to think of."

"I am sorry I told you this, since the discovery is so painful to you."

"Painful! You have stung me to the heart. To think of my husband in such a position—not daring to acknowledge his own brother—a visitor in his father's house without the right to utter his father's name!"

"It is a pity my parents were not wiser in their generation."

said Mr. Harcross with a contemptuous laugh. "If my mother had drowned me in Lake Lucerne, for instance; or if my father had dropped me out of the travelling carriage on the edge of some convenient precipice, you would have been spared this humiliation."

"Laugh at me as much as you please. But dearly as I have loved you, I think I would rather you had died long ago than that I should have lived to suffer what I suffer to-day," said Mrs. Harcross; and with those words she sundered the frail bond that had bound her husband's heart with a sentiment which was half remorse, half gratitude. His gratitude and his remorseful sense of having wronged her perished together, as he listened to that ruthless speech.

"I do not think there are many wives who would have taken such a revelation in such a spirit," he replied, with an exceeding calmness; "but I do think that your character is the natural outcome of your surroundings, and I am hardly surprised. Am I to conclude that you wish to remain here until the proposed end of your visit?"

"Certainly. I will do nothing to make people talk."

"As you please. I came here to gratify you, and shall remain until you're tired. It's half-past six, I see," looking at his watch. "Isn't it time you began to think about dressing for dinner?"

His quiet tone betrayed no emotion whatever. If he were offended ever so deeply, she could not tell how much or how little. There was no quickened breathing, no unsteadiness of the voice, nor the faintest quiver of the firm thin lips.

"Your toilet is such an important business," he said; "and mine only an affair of half an hour. I'll go and smoke my cigar in the colonnade while you make your election between pink and blue." And so they parted; he to go, as he had said, to one of the stone colonnades at the end of the house, where he took another solitary promenade, and solaced his wounded spirit with a cigar.

"I'm glad I told her," he said to himself. "I'm glad she showed me her nature in all its nakedness. Great heaven! what a narrow selfish soul! Not a thought of my loss, or my dishonour. Only herself—the cheat practised upon herself. I don't think I ever understood her thoroughly until to-day. At least I have done with compunction; I shall feel no more remorse for having contracted an engagement I cannot conscientiously fulfil. She only wanted a position, and that I have won for her. Loved me! she never can have loved me; if she had, she would have flung herself upon my breast to-day, and sobbed out her shame *for me* upon my heart. If I had told Grace Redmayne my story! O God! I can see the sweet

sympathetic face lifted up to mine, the tender eyes shining through a mist of tears. I can almost feel the touch of the dear dead hands. O, my love, my love! you would have perished to save my soul from pain; yet your memory is 'the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched.'"

Tullion had rather a hard time of it that evening at the toilet of her mistress. Mrs. Harcross, although distinguished at all times by a bearing which her maid called "orty," or "stand-offish," was, for the most part, a lady of even temper. She was too proud to fly into a passion with a servant, or betray vexation at the failure of a new dress. That omnipresent and mysterious deity called "Society" reigned supreme even in Augusta's dressing-room. She would not suffer her maid to see a countenance which she could not present to Society. This evening, however, Mrs. Harcross was evidently out of sorts.

"Why didn't you order a fire in my room, Tullion?" she exclaimed, looking contemptuously at the grate with its summer finery of paper shavings. "On such a miserable day as this, a fire is an absolute necessity."

"I can light it this moment, ma'am, if you like," replied the dutiful Tullion, ready to speed off in quest of coals and wood.

"And smother me with smoke!" cried Augusta. "No, thank you. I daresay all these old chimneys smoke abominably. What induced you to put out that diamond necklet?" she asked, pointing to a fiery serpent, coiled on a purple velvet cushion, a *chef-d'œuvre* of the jeweller's art, and her father's wedding present. "Do you suppose I am going to parade the contents of my jewel-case every evening?"

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, if I was wrong. But I thought you would wear the amber silk and black lace, and being rather a heavy dress, it wants the relief of di'monds, You've not worn the amber yet."

"I hate amber. Every woman with black hair wears amber. And the dress with the Maltese flounces is not amber, but maize. I wish you would learn to call colours by their right names. You can take out my black silk train."

"Black silk, ma'am!" exclaimed Tullion, aghast. "There ain't a death among the crowned heads of Europe, is there, ma'am?"

"Crowned heads, nonsense!"

"I thought it might be rile mourning, ma'am. You so seldom wear black."

"Pray don't argue the point, Tullion; I shall wear black silk this evening."

It was a petty caprice, no doubt, for so lofty a mind. But

Mrs. Harcross had conceived a sudden horror of all that finery which had been hitherto the chief occupation and delight of her days. The treasures of those vast travelling-cases, brimming over with silks, and satins, and laces, and furbelows, seemed all at once transformed into so much sackcloth and ashes. Good heavens, was she to make herself splendid and conspicuous only to be pointed out as the wife of Sir Lucas Clevedon's natural son? How could she tell how many people knew the story of her husband's birth? This Lord Dartmoor who was in the secret might have told his friends right and left, and such knowledge spreads like a prairie fire. It was not because Mr. Harcross fancied his story unknown that it really was so. Half the people who shook his hand and ate his dinners might be familiar with the circumstances of his birth, and might secretly despise him. It was like living in an atmosphere of contempt.

So the glittering snake, and two infant snakes, his companions, which had coiled themselves into earrings, were put away in their velvet beds, and Mrs. Harcross wore a lustrous black silk dress, with a train three yards long, over which, when hard pressed by Tullion, she consented to wear a tunic of old point lace, which a Roman-catholic bishop might have envied. Dressed thus, with a knot of scarlet ribbon in her dark hair, and an antique cross of black pearls upon her neck, Mrs. Harcross looked more distinguished than in a more elaborate costume.

"There's nothing that don't become you, ma'am!" said the maid rapturously, as she looped up the tunic with a spray of scarlet geranium. "Even black, which is so very trying to most brunette ladies."

Mrs. Harcross contemplated herself contemptuously in the cheval glass before which she was standing, with the maid on her knees at her feet.

What did it matter how well or how ill she looked? She was only the wife of Sir Lucas Clevedon's illegitimate son.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"BUT DEAD THAT OTHER WAY."

MR. WESTON VALLORY, by an undeviating persistence in the habits of industry, had brought himself to such a high state of training, that it was impossible for him to be idle. At his box at Norwood, neatest and daintiest of bachelor boxes, Weston rose with the lark, and was out and about before the milkman. Woe be to the housemaid and the cook if Mr. Vallory's morning

cup of strong tea was not on the little table by his bed-side at half-past five in the summer and at six in the winter! Woe be to the gardener if his master, in his early constitutional, found a weed perking its shameless head amidst the lobelia or verberna in the ribbon bordering, or if the iron roller were not at work betimes upon the gravel, or if the miniature croquet lawn was not close-cropped as the hair of a convict's head! Like clock-work were the arrangements of Weston's modest household. He would give little dinners that were perfection, with his two servants, and a brace of men with trays, who ran down express from Birch's, and gave the finishing touch to their dishes in the tiny Norwood kitchen. Weston could get twice as much work out of his servants as any common master, by reason of his own unflinching industry.

"I never ask you for anything at unreasonable hours," he said; "I never keep you up late at night;" and indeed his latch-key would have rendered this a useless tyranny, as well as an inconvenient one: for few people, besides Mr. Weston Vallory himself, were acquainted with the hour of his return. The servants rarely heard him go upstairs to his room, but at half-past six in the morning he was walking in his garden, fresh and blooming as his standard roses.

"I can do with very little sleep," he said, in his moments of confidence. "Indeed, I consider the habit of going to bed every night an absurd conventionality. In the age of iron, depend upon it, there was no such custom. Do you suppose Julius Cæsar or William the Conqueror called for his chamber-candle every night, and shuffled off to bed like a retired tallow-chandler? There never would have been any stir in the world, if the leaders of men had wasted half their time in sleep in our jog-trot fashion."

A medical friend of Mr. Vallory's, who heard these remarks, ventured to suggest that our lunatic asylums would be more thickly peopled if sleep went out of fashion.

"Very possibly," replied Weston, with his careless air; "I daresay there might be a run upon the mad-houses. You see the question depends very much upon the stuff a man is made of. Take Napoleon the First as an example. He was content with four hours' sleep, and yet he kept himself sane under circumstances which would have sent most men off their heads."

Weston Vallory, perhaps considering that he was made of Napoleonic stuff, rarely indulged himself with more than four hours of that placid slumber which is apt to bless the pillow of a man who is thoroughly satisfied with himself and his own line of life. Thus it was that at Clevedon, after leaving the smoking-room among the last of the night birds, Mr. Vallory generally made his morning toilet to the earliest music of the

thrushes and blackbirds on the lawn under his window. Other guests, who would be early enough a week or two hence, turned their faces to the wall, and pleaded against the stern sense of duty for a little more sleep and a little more slumber. He was in the garden among the rain-beaten roses and passion flowers when the stable clock struck six, on the morning after that day of hopeless downpour which had sorely afflicted the butterfly guests at Clevedon—a peerless summer morning, with a cloudless blue sky and the balmiest air that ever fluttered the roses. If he had been a lover of nature in a Wordsworthian sense, he would have yielded himself up to the soft intoxication of the hour—would have drained to the last drop the enchanted cup of a vague delight. If he had been a painter, he might have revelled in a feast of form and colour—might have composed any number of graceful pictures, with fair figures of his own imagining in the foreground, and those long walks and stiff yew hedges and ancient flower-borders for background and framework. If he had been a pre-Raphaelite, there was enough in every single dew-laden rose-bush; in every cluster of tall lilies lifting up their slender stems amongst tangled masses of carnation or periwinkle; even in the time-worn sundial, gray and grim and stony and moss-grown, amidst the flaunting young hollyhocks, flaming crimson and yellow, to hold him spell-bound, idly gazing. But as he happened to be none of these things, his only impression was of a garden carelessly kept, and of Sir Francis Clevedon's weakness of mind in allowing his work to be done so badly.

Not long did the garden suffice to employ his active mind. He was not a student of velvet-rose petals begemmed with dew. He smoked his "Cavajal;" took a thoughtful walk under the rose-laden arches, and then departed by a little wicket opening into the park.

"I shall have time to reconnoitre this mysterious Brierwood before breakfast," he said to himself. "I wonder how our friend Harcross likes the notion of my being down here. He ought to know that, if there is any little secret history attached to his experiences in this part of the country, I am just the kind of man to hunt up the details. How ridiculously fond Augusta is of him! Not because he is handsomer, or better, or cleverer than other men. I verily believe it is simply because he does not care a straw about her. There was profound truth in that remark of somebody's: 'The only way of making love nowadays is to take not the slightest notice of the lady.'"

He walked through that wilder part of the park, where the Spanish chestnuts rose like leafy towers towards the summer sky, by the way that Hubert Walgrave and Grace Redmayne had taken in the sunset when they met with the viper. For

him that wild forest verdure had no peculiar charm—was, indeed, no more lovely than a trim public garden fresh from the hands of some modern Capability Brown. Yet he did not walk with his eyes cast down, as one whose outward vision is in abeyance, while sordid speculations fill his soul. He looked about him and perceived that everything was very green and blue and sunny, like Kensington Gardens run wild, and shifted beyond the odour of London smoke.

"A fine old place!" he thought; "a man who keeps it in no better order than this hardly deserves to have it."

The south lodge was better tenanted and more smartly appointed than it had been on that summer day when Grace and her lover entered this sylvan scene by the dilapidated oaken gate. The little Gothic dwelling-place had been patched up, scarlet geraniums were trained against the newly pointed brick-work. There were no broken windows now, as there had been in those days of poverty and neglect, but shining lattices, with crisp muslin curtains behind them, and in one special window a basket of blue-and-yellow beadwork, with a canary hanging in a brass cage above it.

"Woman's work, evidently," thought Mr. Vallory; and was in no wise astonished when the little gothic door opened with a sudden bounce, and a damsel tripped out with the key of the gate.

She was the daughter of the head gardener, and a somewhat distinguished young person in her particular walk of life. She was, by common consent, allowed to be the prettiest girl in the three villages of Rayton, Hubbleford, and Kingsbury, and the most consummate flirt. At twenty-three she had broken more hearts than she cared to count, and was now busily engaged in demolishing a very honest one, in the possession of Joseph Flood, Sir Francis Clevedon's own groom, her recognised and legitimate adorer, a young man who had money in the savings-bank, and a praiseworthy yearning to begin life as a grocer and confectioner, with a dash of ready-made boots and shoes, and perhaps a sprinkling of linendrapery, in the village of Rayton, a little fringe of houses and tiny shops on the high road near Clevedon Park, which was familiarly known to the Clevedon retainers as "up-street."

As Jane Bond came tripping across the tiny lodge garden this morning, serenely conscious of a well-starched and well-fitting cotton gown, Weston Vallory thought that he had never seen a prettier woman. He was not a man of ultra-refined taste in the matter of feminine beauty. This florid full-flavoured style, this shining black hair, these black eyes, rosy cheeks, and ripe red lips, realised his highest notions upon the subject. His archetypal woman would have been no lovelier than Jane Bond, whose

features were regular although commonplace, and whose bold black eyes were set off by a peerless complexion of the rustic brunette order.

He went towards the gate quite silently, struck dumb for the moment by admiration, but not for long. His agreeable cockney breeding quickly reasserted itself, with that gracious ease of manner which was wont to distinguish him.

"Do many people come to Clevedon this way?" he asked, surveying the girl with a look of somewhat audacious admiration.

"Not very many, sir," Miss Bond answered with a careless shrug, not at all disconcerted by that undisguised homage. "It's awful dull."

"Then I'm sure they can't know what a pretty girl there is to open the gate," said Weston, "or they'd come by this lodge if it was a mile out of their way. The men, I mean, of course; the women would hardly like to be reminded of their own ugliness by such a contrast."

This was the sort of thing which suited Miss Bond, and to which she was tolerably accustomed. She was able to retort upon Mr. Vallory with an impudent readiness which was apt to pass for wit among her admirers—"to give him as good as he brought," as she said afterwards when she described the little scene to the postman's daughter, her friend and confidante.

Her ready answers charmed Mr. Vallory, so, although on business intent, he dawdled a little in the early summer morning, to indulge in a kind of badinage which he had practised considerably with young ladies of the ballet-girl and barmaid class, and which he knew how to adapt to the simpler tastes of this rustic beauty. He wasted a quarter of an hour or so in this conversation, and by the end of that time was on quite a friendly footing with the damsel. She had informed him that her father was a Primitive Methodist, a member of the flock led by a certain Joshua Bogg, an enlightened tailor, whose temple was at Hubbleford, and that he was very strict and stern with her. She had told him what a dull life she had at the south lodge, and how much she had preferred living up-street in Rayton, where she and her father had abode until Sir Francis came to Clevedon, though their dwelling there had been less convenient, and they had had no garden.

"There was always some one to speak to at Rayton," she said, "if it was only old women and children. But here there's no one."

"Isn't there now?" said Weston. "Why, I should have thought people would come any distance to talk to such a girl as you—a girl who is as clever as she's handsome."

"Ah, there's plenty of that kind," replied Miss Bond, with a little supercilious toss of her head; "plenty that would come and

hang about the place, if I'd let 'em, and get me into disgrace with father, and set people talking. But I don't want that kind of thing; I never have encouraged it, though they do call me a flirt."

"O, they do call you a flirt!" said Weston. "But, my dear girl, you are a great deal too clever not to know that slander is a kind of tribute which the world pays to superior merit. If you were not the prettiest girl within twenty miles, no one would trouble himself—or herself, for it is generally herself who is troubled about such matters—by remarking your flirtations. There are women who would give the world to lose their reputation in the same way."

Miss Bond did not dispute the wisdom of these remarks. "It don't much matter to me, any way," she said, "except when it sets father scolding, and ding-donging the Scriptures at me, as if I was the daughter of Sion, or as if I ever sat upon seven hills. Howsomedever, I shall be out of it all soon, that's one comfort, and out of this dull hole, and living in Rayton."

This was said with a tone and a simper which were quite enough for Mr. Vallory's enlightenment.

"You mean that you are going to be married?" he said.

"Yes, I suppose so, before very long. I've been a long time making up my mind, but I've been bothered into making it up at last. I'm going to settle."

"Settle!" cried Weston. "What an odious word, miserably expressive of an odious fact! Such a beauteous butterfly as you should never 'settle' upon one flower, while all the gardens of earth lie before you. Settle! Make an end of all the uncertainties of life, and tie yourself down to a cottage at Rayton. If you only knew your own value, my dear Miss Bond, you would not dream of such a sacrifice. Settle! Why, a woman with your advantages should never dream of marrying on the right side of thirty. How can a woman tell what her chances may be till she has come to the meridian of her beauty? At eighteen she may be engaged to a gardener, and at eight-and-twenty she may find herself a duchess. But perhaps you don't know the history of the slave girl, who married the great Russian emperor; and possibly you may never have heard of the famous Polly who became Duchess of Bolton, and who never was your equal in good looks."

"I suppose you know this young woman you call Polly?" said Miss Bond curiously. She was not at all disinclined to listen to this kind of talk. It opened dazzling vistas of thought, a vague glittering vision of a possible future. She had dreamed her ambitious dreams, even in the lonely south lodge; but the wildest imaginings that could arise spontaneously in her untutored brain had been small and sordid in comparison with such

ideas as were conjured up by the suggestions of Weston Vallory.

"No," he said with his supercilious grin, "I had not the honour of knowing Polly. She was before my time. But I have seen her portrait by Hogarth—a sallow sharp-featured beauty, in a mob-cap, acting Polly Peachum between two rows of fine gentlemen seated at the side scenes. You are a hundred times handsomer than Polly."

He looked at his watch. This rustic philandering was pleasant enough, but at the best it was a waste of time, and Weston Vallory's industrious habits had made waste of time almost impossible to him. He had business to get through that morning before breakfast. You know Brierwood Farm, of course. Miss Bond?" he said.

The girl stared at him wonderingly. This sudden transition from a florid compliment to a commonplace question took her a little by surprise.

"Lor, yes, I know Brierwood well enough—Farmer Redmayne's."

"Redmayne—yes, I think that is the name. But the Redmayne race have migrated, have they not? They have all gone to Australia, I hear."

"Gone and come back," Miss Bond answered carelessly, twirling her big key with a somewhat offended air. She did not quite relish this unceremonious cutting short of the talk about her own beauty and possible offers of marriage from dukes.

"Come back?"

"Yes; Mr. Redmayne—Richard Redmayne, O, come back this ever so long—before the hay was carted, about the time Sir Francis was married. And they do say he's changed so that those who knew him best five years ago would hardly know him now."

"And what has changed him in such a remarkable manner?" asked Weston, with eager interest.

"Troubles," answered Miss Bond, shaking her head solemnly.

"What kind of troubles?—money troubles?"

"O, dear, no. Folks say he found no end of gold in Australia, and that he could buy Clevedon off Sir Francis, if he chose. It isn't want of money makes him so gloomy. I met him on Kingsbury Common one evening, just as it was growing dark, close upon a month ago—they say he never goes out in the day-time—and I'm sure I was almost frightened at his dark angry-looking face. I shouldn't have known him, for I remember him such a good-looking free-spoken man; and I wished him good-evening, but he never answered a word, or gave me so much as a civil nod—only stared at me in a wild kind of way as if I'd been a mile off."

"A bad account, Miss Bond. I fear this Mr. Redmayne must be in a bad way. But what can be the cause of it? If not money troubles, what kind of troubles?"

"You're a stranger here, or you'd know pretty well as much as I do," answered Miss Bond, still twirling her key, but with a gossip's growing interest in the discussion of other people's business; "yet you spoke just now as if you knew all about Brierwood and Mr. Redmayne."

"Yes, yes, I know a good deal about him, but not all his family affairs," said Weston, rather impatiently. "How about this trouble—what was it?"

"His daughter," answered the girl tersely.

"His daughter?"

"Yes, an only daughter, which he doated on the very ground she walked upon; and while he was away in Australia, she died."

"Hard lines," said Weston, in his practical way, "but a fate to which all men's daughters are more or less liable. Is that all?"

"She died," repeated Jane Bond, with wide solemn eyes—"died awful sudden!"

"Made away with herself?" inquired Weston, with keener interest.

"No, I don't suppose it was quite as bad as that, though nobody I know of can say for certain. The Redmaynes have been so uncommon close about it. She went away——"

"O, she died away from home, then?"

"Yes, went away, and no one ever heard where she went or why she went, and no one heard for ever so long after that she was dead, and no one ever heard where she died, or who she was with when she died. It was nobody's business, of course, but her father's and her friends'; but still people will talk, you know, and when other people are not free-spoken and above-board, it makes one think there's something in the background."

"Something in the background!" repeated Weston; "no doubt there was something in the background. A lover, for instance. Did you ever hear of any lover?"

"Never. There wasn't a quieter girl than Miss Redmayne; she went to school at the Wells, and was brought up quite the lady. No I, never heard of any one. There was a gentleman lodged there, I believe the summer before Miss Redmayne died, but I never heard a word about him and her."

"Do you remember the gentleman's name?"

"No. I heard it at the time, I daresay, but if I did, I've clean forgotten it."

"Did you ever see him?"

"Never."

"Humph," muttered Weston thoughtfully, "and the girl died away from home. But you don't know where?"

"Not for certain. I fancy I've heard say she went to London, but Mrs. James Redmayne—that's Richard Redmayne's brother's wife—was always very snip-snappish about it."

"Did they bring the daughter home to be buried?"

"O dear, no. She'd been dead ever so long before anybody knew anything about it except her own people, even if *they* knew."

"How do you know that she really is dead?" said Weston in a speculative tone. "She may have run away with some one—gone wrong, as you call it in the country—and her family might prefer to tell this story about her death rather than confess the truth."

This suggestion of a small social mystery was not unpleasing to Jane Bond. She shook her head and sighed with a solemn air that might mean anything,

"There's no knowing what may be at the bottom of it," she said, after a pause. "Miss Redmayne's mother died young, and died sudden, but still there's no knowing. I've heard say, from those that knew him well, that Richard Redmayne was always a proud man, though he was so free-spoken. And everybody knew how he loved his daughter. If anything went wrong with her, he'd be sure to take it deeply to heart."

"Naturally, and would be likely to invent the story of her death in order to shield her. Depend upon it, Miss Redmayne is as much alive as you or I, and living very comfortably somewhere. In some snug little box St.-John's-wood way, very likely," he added to himself rather than to Miss Bond; "I'd give a year's income to find her."

He looked at his watch again, and this time wished Miss Bond good-morning. She opened the new iron gate, and he went through on to the dusty road. He had spent a good deal of his morning's leisure, but he had spent it profitably. It was hardly likely that any one would be able to tell him much more about the Redmayne household than he had just heard from Jane Bond.

"I knew there was something," he said to himself as he walked along the road in a triumphant spirit; "I could have wagered my existence there was something. I saw it in Harcross's face the evening after the wedding, when Augusta talked of Brierwood. He's an excellent actor, but he couldn't deceive me. And this was at the bottom of his disinclination to come to Clevedon. *That* confirmed my idea. The girl died away from home—a very easy way of settling for her and making an end of the story. These country clodhoppers are as proud as Lucifer, and would tell any lie rather than bear the burden of

disgrace. I wouldn't mind backing my own opinion that Miss Redmayne is comfortably hidden away in some dainty little retreat within the four-mile radius, and that Walgrave Harcross pays the rent and taxes; and if my idea is a sound one, it shall go hard with me if I don't unearth the lady."

He walked on to Brierwood, surveyed the picturesque old farmhouse, peered in at the garden-gate, stared at the windows, but could perceive no token of life within except the slender thread of smoke curling up from the chimney at the inferior end of the building. After the account he had just heard of Mr. Redmayne he was not at all inclined to beard that wounded lion in his den, so he found a humble roadside inn within about a quarter of a mile, where he asked for a bottle of soda-water with a glass of sherry in it, and while sipping that compound and recognising that peculiar flavour of publican's sherry, which is at once hot and sweet and sour, he contrived to make a few inquiries about Mr. Redmayne and his belongings.

The innkeeper was less communicative than Miss Bond, and was evidently disinclined to talk about Richard Redmayne's troubles or Richard Redmayne's daughter.

"Yes, there was a daughter," he said, in answer to Weston's cross-questioning; "and she died, and poor Redmayne took it to heart, and has never been the same man since. He went to Australia, and made money at the diggings, and bought a farm out there, and sent his brother's family over to work it for him; and he's let off his land here, and does nothing all day but sit in the garden and smoke, I'm told. All I know is, that he never comes nigh me, and he used to drop in pretty often in a friendly way, though he was never a drinking man."

That was about as much as Mr. Vallory could obtain for the price of his undrinkable soda-and-sherry; but so far as it went, it served to confirm the story Jane Bond had told him. He turned his face homewards, refreshed in body and mind by his healthy morning walk and the crumbs of information gathered on the road, and his bosom filled with that serene consciousness of having improved the shining hour which may be supposed to have cheered and sustained the busy bee.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"THINK YOU, I AM NO STRONGER THAN MY SEX?"

CLEVEDON HALL and Clevedon Chase lost all their pleasantness in the eyes of Mrs. Harcross after that confession of her husband's. She was not a woman to envy the advantages of

another, had never in her life felt so mean an anguish; but it did not the less seem to her that this noble old mansion and all its belongings should by right have been Hubert's, and that it was a bitter thing to see him a guest in the house where he ought to have been master. Since that revelation in the picture gallery, she had thought of nothing else, and it had been very difficult for her to contribute her quota to the common fund of liveliness and society talk. Weston's observant eye had detected the change, and he would have been very glad to know the nature of the disturbing influence. Had Augusta's suspicions been aroused by the circumstances that had awakened his? Did she begin to doubt her husband's entire devotion to herself? Was she in a temper in which it would be safe to hint his own doubts upon that subject? He did not forget the conversation at the dinner-table, on the first night at Clevedon, and how Augusta had risen in the might of her wifely affection, like the lioness who defends her young. Prudence was ever his guiding star, so he held his peace for a time, and looked about him.

"I don't want to be premature," he said to himself. "It would be a mistake to approach the subject till I've got a case. And if I keep quiet and look about me, I'm pretty sure to find out something more; and when I do drop down upon you, Mr. Walgrave Harcross, I mean the drop to be a crusher."

What was his motive? A mixed one. In the first place, he never had forgiven, and he never meant to forgive, Hubert Harcross for having come between him and his cousin; and in the second place—perhaps he himself could hardly have given a clear statement of his secondary motive. He knew that he wanted—in his own words—to "square accounts" with his rival, and he knew that, beyond that settlement in the immediate present, he had views for the future—views which he did not care to put into any definite shape just yet, but which were, nevertheless, interwoven with the whole scheme of his life. He had sown his wild oats, had made an end of the frivolities of youth, and could afford to concentrate all his thoughts and desires upon this one purpose.

The driving, and riding, and picnicking, and croquet-playing, and afternoon tea-drinking in the old-fashioned garden, went on just the same, after that one rainy day, and Mrs. Harcross performed her part in all these diversions, despite those corroding thoughts which were now ever present with her. She might have pleaded headache or fatigue, or long arrears of correspondence, and shut herself in her own room, there to brood over her misery unseen by human eyes, except the eyes of Tullion. But to do this, she argued with herself, would be to set people wondering; and, with that strange likeness between Sir Francis Clevedon and Hubert Harcross always before them, who could

tell whether some observer, more acute than the common herd, might not fathom that shameful secret? No, she would face the world, and defy suspicion, if, indeed, the secret were still safe—a question upon which she sometimes suffered excruciating doubts.

Had she no pity for her husband, the primary victim, who for no fault of his own stood thus divided from his fellow-men, with a cruel blot upon his name? She did pity him, but in so much less a degree than she pitied herself for having unwittingly linked herself with his dishonour, that her compassion had not much weight. She could not forgive him for having married her on false pretences, for having withheld a secret that would have unquestionably prevented her acceptance of him.

"If I had loved him to distraction," she told herself, "I would have broken my heart rather than I would have married him, knowing what I know now."

She felt angry with her father even for the carelessness which had exposed her to such a calamity.

"To think of papa, a lawyer, with his wide experience, taking no pains to find out my husband's actual pedigree."

Mrs. Harcross forgot the very resolute tone she had taken about this marriage, which had made Mr. Vallory somewhat diffident in the matter of interference or opposition. It seemed a hard thing that she, who was, as it were, the very nursling of the law, should have been thus cheated—that all the parchment and legal stationery in the offices of Harcross and Vallory could not save her from this degradation.

"If I were quite sure that no one knew!" she said to herself. "But, then, how can I tell? How can I suppose that Lord Dartmoor kept his own counsel?"

The windows of her bedroom and dressing-room looked over the noblest part of the park, and the prospect, which had been agreeable enough at first, now filled her with unspeakable bitterness. It was his, perhaps, Hubert's; by right and justice his very own. Who could tell that there had not been a marriage, and a legal one? O, foolish wretched mother, to leave her son's rights unasserted, undefended!

Even Georgina Clevedon suffered a little in Augusta's estimation. She could not feel quite so fond of her as she had been before. She was always asking herself—"Which is the interloper, she or I?"

Between the husband and wife there had been no farther quarrel; only a terrible calm, like a dull dead sunless stillness upon a cold gray sea. Hubert Harcross was deeply wounded. Even in that loveless marriage, loveless at least on one side, there had been some kind of bond. He had been grateful for his wife's preference, had admired her and been proud of her; had even,

in his better moods, looked forward to a day when years of peaceful association should have brought them a little closer together, should have developed some mutual sympathies, some common thoughts and aspirations. But that was all over now. She had outraged his pride, stung him as he had never been stung before by man or woman. He shut her out of his heart. To the end of his existence she must remain a stranger to him, or something worse than a stranger—an enemy who had offended him beyond the possibility of forgiveness.

Augusta hardly realised the nature of the breach between them. Absorbed for the time in her own feelings, she had not yet attempted to analyse those of her husband. She could see that he was offended, but she took no trouble to conciliate him. It seemed, indeed, a hard thing that he should take umbrage at her natural indignation. He had cheated her, and was offended because she resented the wrong he had done. She was one of those people who can sustain this kind of silent warfare, and who are never the first to hang out the flag of truce. So long as the proprieties were not outraged, she was content. Before the eyes of the world, Mr. Harcross was still polite and attentive to his wife. In the seclusion of their own rooms, they scarcely spoke to each other.

While these who had once sworn eternal love and obedience were thus dragging a lengthening chain, Georgie Clevedon was tasting all the sweets of early married life; that balmy spring-time of existence in which the days are all sunshine and soft west wind, and all the trees of the garden in blossom; that glimpse of Eden and man before the fall.

"We have been married more than three months and have not quarrelled yet, Frank," she said to her husband one morning, in a little burst of child-like happiness. "Do you think we ever *could* quarrel?"

"Of course not, darling. Can a man quarrel with the better part of himself, the brighter half of his own nature?"

"Yet one hears so often of domestic unhappiness," said Georgie, with a sudden thoughtfulness; "and I suppose people always begin by loving each other as well as you and I do. I mean to say that mercenary marriages, or marriages of convenience, must be the exception and not the rule. And yet so few people seem really happy, as you and I are. There are the Harcrosses, for instance; that *must* have been a love match, for Augusta had a fortune, and Mr. Harcross hadn't; so on her side at least it must have been a love match. But they seem such an uncomfortable couple; very polite to each other, and so on, but seeming to live only for the world."

"Why, you wouldn't have them billing and cooing in our style, Georgie;" cried Sir Francis, laughing. "It's a long time

since their honeymoon, remember; and then you can hardly expect a popular barrister to go in for that sort of thing. He has too much sentiment in his breach-of-promise cases. Besides Harcross, though a very good fellow, seems of rather too hard a composition for a lover. I couldn't imagine Harcross in love."

"Don't say that, Frank, when people say he's like you."

"Physically perhaps. But you see we are not obliged to resemble each other morally. He is a man who worships success, Georgie; no woman need expect to stand for much in the life of such a man. His wife must be satisfied if he wins her a title some day."

"I daresay Augusta would think more of that," said Georgie. "I like her very much, you know; but I can't help seeing that she is rather worldly."

Of course this devoted young couple could not have much time to themselves while their house was full of company. They were obliged to be perpetually planning new diversions, fresh drives, and rides, and ruins, and show-houses for their friends; to be continually on the watch to prevent the demon of dulness stealing into the circle. They succeeded very well in the performance of these duties, and though they often told each other in confidence that Clevedon was much nicer when they had it all to themselves, and that they should be glad when the people were gone, they contrived nevertheless to enjoy life, and to bring very gay spirits to every fresh amusement. To Georgie all the importance and grandeur of her position as châtelaine seemed very much like playing at keeping house. It was so new to reign over a larger kingdom than that in which Pedro the monkey, and Tufto the deer-hound, and Kitmutgar the bull-terrier, and Sicee the pug, were her chief subjects; so new to have servants who would scarcely lift their eyes to behold her countenance, instead of the fat familiar cook with whom her father had been wont to hold long conversations, of a culinary nature, through the kitchen window.

"I feel myself such an impostor, Franky," she said to her husband, "when Mrs. Mixer asks me if I have any alteration to make in the bill of fare, and I can only think of papa's favourite dishes—curried prawns, and devilled kidneys, and mulligatawny soup."

The great event of the year was to be the fête on Sir Francis Clevedon's birthday. The whole affair had been Georgie's scheme from first to last, and Sir Francis had been not a little reluctant to be made an object of interest in the eyes of his tenants.

"It seems so absurd, Georgie," he had remonstrated, more than once, "for a man of nine-and-twenty to keep his birthday."

"Nonsense, Frank! Didn't George the Third have a jubilee

when he was ever so old? And this is to be your first birthday at Clevedon. It is your coming of age, in fact; for you never did come of age, or only in a sneaking way at Bruges, or some other horrid Flemish town, where all the streets smell of garlic. If you don't want to keep your birthday, I shall begin to think you are not at all glad you married me, and that you are afraid to show your tenants the sort of wife you have chosen."

Of course the lady had her own way, and, having once secured her husband's consent to the business, did not rest till she had obtained *carte blanche* as to details. Then did Colonel Davenant arise in his glory. He drove over to Clevedon every morning to breakfast, and from morn till dewy eve he and his daughter were more or less occupied with mysterious consultations and discussions about the fête. Strange men came down from town to take orders about lamps and marquees, and temporary fountains which were to gush forth in the midst of roses. Other strange men hung about the park with a view to fireworks.

Sir Francis shivered as he thought how much all this would cost him, and what John Wort would say to his extravagances. Would not that faithful steward declare, with some appearance of justification, that he was going the way of his father?

There was to be a dinner for the tenantry in one monster marquee, a dinner for the villagers from twenty miles round in two other tents, including every ploughboy who ploughed Sir Francis Clevedon's land, every crowboy who scared the rooks from the newly-sown corn; and in the afternoon and early evening there was to be dancing upon a broad expanse of level greensward in the park, where the depredations of Sir Lucas among his ancestral oaks had left a fine lawn. Later in the evening there was to be dancing for the "quality" in the great dining-hall, which was to become a very garden of roses and exotics. Colonel Davenant's ideas were of Eastern splendour.

"We want golden tissue hangings for the doorways, and some dancing girls to perform an interlude when the people are tired, Georgie," he said, with a desponding air; "there's no little to be done in England."

It was at the Colonel's suggestion that Lady Clevedon organised a band of honorary stewards, who were to wear her insignia, a moss rosebud and a knot of blue satin ribbon, and were to provide for the comfort and amusement of the guests, gentle and simple. This onerous office was assigned to all those gentlemen staying in the house, and Mr. Harcross found himself pledged to preside at one of the tables in the villagers' marquee, and to circulate all day with a bunch of blue ribbon at his button-hole. He accepted the charge meekly, and promised to do his duty, in quite a Nelsonian spirit.

"'For England, Home, and Beauty,'" he said. "I hope the Kentish damsels are pretty, Lady Clevedon."

The careless empty words were scarce spoken, when a little pang shot through his heart. So much that a man says in society is purely mechanical; but no sooner was that speech uttered than he bethought himself of one gentle maiden who might have been all the world to him, had he so chosen.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"A NATIVE SKILL HER SIMPLE ROBES EXPRESS'D."

It was the eve of the birthday fête, a sultry afternoon with the thermometer at 80° in the shade, and not a leaf stirring in Clevedon Park. Jane Bond gave a little impatient sigh every now and then, as she sat at work in an arbour sheltered with hop-vines, and comfortably placed in a corner of the trim little garden belonging to the south lodge; a sigh which was caused partly by the heat of the weather, and partly by a natural anxiety upon the subject of her needlework.

She was making her dress for to-morrow's festival, and having only decided at the last moment that she would have a new and brilliant pink muslin, instead of a lavender garment of the same fabric, which had been her "Sunday frock" last summer, Miss Bond was working against time. Her decision had been in some manner influenced by the present of a sovereign from Weston Vallery, ostensibly to buy a neck-ribbon.

"I know you are fond of pretty colours," he said, "and I want you to buy the brightest ribbon in Tunbridge. Men have no taste in these matters, or I should have chosen it for you myself."

It was not often that Miss Bond was gratified by the gift of a sovereign, though her father was reputed to have saved money, and to be better off than most of his class. Of course, if he had been in the habit of giving his daughter casual sovereigns, he would have been less able to carry small sums to the savings-bank. Jane was clad comfortably, out soberly, as became the daughter of a God-fearing Primitive Methodist, and her father chose her gowns himself for the most part, so that she should not offend the eye of the elect by gaudy colours or eccentric patterns. In neat spots and narrow stripes, in lavenders and duns and grays, Miss Bond was obliged to walk this earth, as contentedly or discontentedly as she pleased. She kept her father's house for him, and every Saturday evening had to render up a strict account of the past week's expenses. There

was more money spent upon starch than Joshua Bond approved, but if he complained of this item, he was always informed that his Sunday's white shirt was the chief cause of the expense.

"I think it's your sticking-out gowns, Jane," the gardener would reply sternly; "two pounds of starch in a week! It's downright sinful."

Sometimes when Miss Bond's accounts had been particularly accurate, no odd fourpence-farthing or twopence-halfpenny deficient, and when the expenditure had been unusually light, Joshua would relax his grip upon the balance so far as to present his daughter with a stray shilling.

"Put it in your money-box, Jane," he said; "you've got a money-box, I suppose?"

"Yes, father," Miss Bond replied promptly, mindful of a long disused and disabled cardboard institution, with tiny glass windows, lurking somewhere on the inaccessible top shelf of an upstairs cupboard. "O, yes, father, I've got a box."

Thus it was that on receiving Mr. Vallory's present—Weston had found occasion to go in and out by the south gate several times since his first encounter with the gardener's daughter—thus it was that Miss Bond, with her admirer's sovereign in her pocket, could venture to prefer a request to her father.

"You wouldn't mind my wearing bright colours for once in a way, would you, father?" she inquired in a pleading tone, when he had lighted his evening pipe, after an especially comfortable meat-tea. "I should look such a dowdy among all the other girls in that wishy-washy lavender thing you bought me last summer. It doesn't take the starch well, you know, and——"

"Doesn't take the starch!" cried the aggrieved parent. "I should like to know what material would take as much starch as you use; I sometimes think you must give it to the fowls."

"O, father, what a shame to say that, when I take such pains with your collars and things! How would you like your Sunday shirt to be limp and crumpled?"

"My shirt—two pounds of starch a week for my shirt!"

"Don't be cross, father, or I shall be obliged to go out to service and work for somebody else. I should get wages then, and could use as much starch as I liked, and you'd have to keep a servant, and pay her for doing what I do," said Miss Bond, in whose breast rebellious fires were always lurking, ready to blaze up at the first provocation. "There's not many girls of my age——"

"Girls of your age! I should call you a woman!" growled her father.

"There's not many young women would put up with being kept as close as I'm kept," continued Miss Bond recklessly. "Nawsomever, I don't want to complain. But as I've saved

a few shillings, that you've given me now and then, I suppose you'll make no objection to my buying a pink muslin for the 'feet.'"

"Buy what you like," said the father with a groan, "as long as it isn't out of my money. If your own sense won't teach you what's proper for a young woman in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call you, I can't teach you. Make yourself a merry-andrew if you like."

"A merry fiddlestick!" exclaimed Miss Bond. "I don't see why the wicked people should have all the pretty colours."

So having wrung this unwilling consent from her father, Jane Bond had walked to Tunbridge Wells in the early morning, and had arrived at her favourite draper's shop just as the shutters were being taken down. Here she purchased as many yards of bright pink-and-white muslin as could be bought for a sovereign, for her ideas on the subject of flouncings and pleatings were almost as extensive as a West-end milliners'. She sat in her arbour this afternoon with a pile of neatly-folded muslin frilling upon the table before her, and plied her needle with almost feverish haste, cheered by thoughts of coming triumphs.

How they would all stare at her pink dress, made in a style which she had copied from a morning dress of Lady Clevedon's—a costume devised by the great Bouffante herself! There was Mary Mason, the laundry maid—between whom and Jane Bond there was a tacit rivalry—who was going to wear a new brown alpaca, much bedecked with braid and buttons, but a very vulgar and commonplace garment compared with that enchanting muslin.

"I wonder what *he'll* think of it?" Jane said to herself, as she began to turn down an almost endless hem; and the *he* who occupied so important a place in her thoughts was not her affianced husband, Joseph Flood, but her new admirer, Weston Vallory.

The latch of the garden-gate fell with a little clicking sound, while she sat working in the western sunshine. The muslin flounce dropped from her busy hands, and she looked up eagerly with a sudden deepening of her rosy cheeks. But the person who had lifted the latch was not the person she had been thinking about; and she took up the flounce again with rather an impatient twitch, and went on folding the hem. Her visitor was only Joseph Flood. She had no right to expect any one else, since it was not Mr. Vallory's habit to open the garden-gate. A flirtation with a rustic beauty was pleasant enough; but Weston had too much respect for his own reputation to run the risk of being seen loafing in the lodge garden, in sentimental converse with the gardener's daughter. A little dawdling talk

by the park gate, which could be cut short at a moment's warning, was the utmost indulgence he permitted himself.

Miss Bond, however, who could not estimate the extent of her admirer's prudence, and who had no small idea of her own attractions, may have nursed some vague hope of his dropping in unexpectedly this summer evening before the eight o'clock dinner, to while away half an hour in her society. And, lo, instead of the London dandy, in his faultless boots and wonderful waistcoat, here was only honest Joseph Flood, whose highest merit was to love her to distraction, and whose powers of expression were of the poorest. She went on folding and pinching the muslin, with the bold black eyes cast down and a somewhat sulky look in the full red lips, while Joe came shambling towards the arbour, using his long legs as if they were an embarrassment to him in the absence of his horse.

Greetings are usually dispensed with in this class of life; so the groom hardly noticed the coldness of his reception, and dropped down upon the bench by his mistress's side without a word, put his stalwart arm round her waist, and administered the privileged kiss of an affianced husband. Jane drew herself away from him with an impatient shrug.

"I wish you wouldn't be so tiresome, Joseph," she said peevishly. "I'm sure the weather's too hot for kissing, and I don't believe you've shaved this morning."

"Ah, but I have, though; I suppose one's beard grows faster this weather."

"Your chin does scrub so; I'd as lief have a bit of emery paper rubbed across my face. Don't squeeze so close to me, Joe; there's room enough on the bench without that. I've got all those flounces to hem and put on the skirt before I go to bed to-night."

"O, it's a new gown, is it, that there's all this fuss about?" said Joseph, contemplating the pink frills with a contemptuous air; "then all I can say is, if you're going to be so ill-tempered every time you get a new gown, I hope you won't have many of 'em when we're married."

"It's just like you to say that, Joseph," replied Miss Bond, in a lofty tone; "now if you were a gentleman, you'd take an interest in my dresses, and think nothing too good for me."

"But I ain't a gentleman, you see, and if you're to lose your temper with me for the sake of a parcel of fal-lals like that there, I'd rather see you dressed anyhow than decked out as fine as a peacock."

Miss Bond tossed her head and went on with her work assiduously. It was not the first time she had seen Joseph Flood since her acquaintance with Mr. Vallory, and in the course of previous interviews she had favoured him with vague hints of

being admired and appreciated by people of higher capacity to admire and appreciate than he possessed, and with ampler resources wherewith to back their opinions. Joseph was of a jealous nature, and had been quick to resent these remarks.

"It doesn't much matter whether you like my dress or not, that's one comfort," the girl said presently; "there's more people in the world besides you, and I daresay there'll be some at the 'feat' to-morrow that *will* admire me."

"I suppose you mean a pack of fine gentlemen," replied Joseph sullenly; "no prudent girl want their admiration."

"Then I'm afraid I'm not a prudent girl," remarked Jane, with a little affected giggle; "for I do like to be admired, and I set more store upon a gentleman's admiration than a common man's."

"I'm sorry for you then, Jane Bond," said the lover sternly, "for if that's true you'll never make a good wife to an honest working man. But I don't believe it is true. You're always up to some blessed game of this kind, trying to take a rise out of me. And yet you know there never was a young man fonder of a young woman than I am of you. But I'm not the sort of a man to stand any nonsense."

This kind of protestation was gratifying to Miss Bond's vanity, and she was somewhat mollified by it, and even allowed the arm of her legitimate lover to steal around her waist and remain there placidly while she stitched her flounces; but throughout that evening the talk between the affianced ones was of a skirmishing character, and Jane Bond indulged in numerous suggestive remarks, all tending to show how much brighter and better her lot in life might have been, had she so pleased, than Mr. Flood the groom could possibly make it. She was all good temper and high spirits, however, for the rest of the evening, pleased with the effect of her dress as it proceeded towards completion. She insisted on Mr. Flood staying to supper, and cut him the most delicate slices of cold boiled bacon, and graciously compounded a glass of gin-and-water for him at her father's behest; but notwithstanding these civilities, Joseph Flood left the south lodge in a savage humour, and bent his steps towards his bed-chamber over the stables meditating vengeance, convinced that Jane Bond meant to fool him.

"She's just the kind of woman to do it," he thought; "she knows she's the prettiest girl within twenty mile—ay, within fifty mile, I'll warrant—and she takes advantage of it. I'll be bound some of those London dandies have been talking their nonsense to her—the Captain, perhaps; there's nothing like a soldier for that sort of mischief. But if she does try to make a fool of me, I'll be even with her, and I'll be even with the man that comes between us."

He was a determined young fellow, this Joseph Flood; a muscular Christian, with more muscularity than Christianity, and in this one matter of his attachment to Jane Bond his sentiments were of a somewhat desperate character. She had played her fish a considerable time before she netted him, holding him at arm's-length, pretending to be quite indifferent to him one day, delighting him by her amiability the next, and appearing absolutely to detest him the day after that. These alternate hot and cold douches, these alternations of despair and delight, had the intended effect. A prize so hard to win seemed to Mr. Flood the one crowning reward of man's endeavours. He wooed the gardener's daughter with a boundless patience. It was only when she did at last consent to pledge herself to him, declaring that she had been bothered into saying yes, that Mr. Flood assumed a more independent tone, treating the lady henceforward as his own peculiar property rather than as a divinity to whom he was bound to pay continual worship.

This independent manner of his, this unpleasant way of taking everything for granted, was particularly provoking to Jane Bond, who had an insatiable appetite for flattery. She did not rest until she had found out her lover's weak point, and that she could torture him into savage fits of jealousy. Having discovered this power, she used it rather frequently, and their walks to and from chapel were apt to be spent in silent sulkiness or open quarrelling. Yet the young man clung to her, and went on loving her, and looked forward to the day when she was to be his wife.

"If you was to play me a trick, Jenny; if you was to jilt me and marry another fellow, I think I should be tempted to murder you," he said to her one day, during the first moments of reconciliation after an unusually angry quarrel.

"Wouldn't it be wiser to murder the other fellow?" Miss Bond asked, laughing.

"Perhaps I might do both," answered Joseph Flood, in a tone that was sufficiently serious to alarm his betrothed.

She clung to his arm quite affectionately, more gratified by this threat than by any compliment he'd ever paid her.

"I do think you're fond of me, Joseph," she said; "and I don't believe there's any love worth having without jealousy. As for playing you any tricks, there's no fear of that. But I can't help wishing sometimes that we were both better off than we are. I think I'd rather die than look forward to being such a drudge as most of the women I know come to after marriage."

"There's no call for you to be a drudge, Jenny. You can be as smart after marriage as you are now. It's only slovens that come to be drudges."

"As you don't know. Men never understand how much

work a woman has to do. You'd want your victuals cooked and your clothes washed, just as father does; and if there was children, there'd be them to do for, and the shop to look after too, when you was out of the way."

"I thought you'd like the notion of the shop, Jane," said the lover, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. In his own idea, a shop was a kind of ready-made income without work or effort. He would only have to sit behind his counter reading a newspaper, or asleep with his head against the wall, snoring peacefully in the sunshine, while the money dropped into the till.

"Yes, the shop's all very well, answered Jane. "I sometimes fancy I should like weighing things, and having a lot of nice little drawers full of starch, and mustard, and rice, and sago, and all that, and a little stock of fancy stationery in the window laid out tempting like, and perhaps even a few pots of bear's-grease, and sixpenny bottles of lavender-water, and neat little boxes of hair-pins. I've heard tell there's a deal of profit on them small things. But when it came to be the same from week's end to week's end, and perhaps bad debts; and after all it's hard work, like anything else——"

"Then drop the notion of the shop, Jane. I don't care; I can keep on in service."

"O, no, that would never do. I couldn't marry to have my husband in service. People would say I was very hard driven to get a husband."

"They could never think that of you, Jenny, even if they said it. But I'm blest if I know what you do want, if you don't want me to have the shop at Rayton that we've always talked of."

Perhaps, had Jane been closely questioned, she herself would have found it very difficult to explain her desires. She only felt a vague and general discontent. It would be much better to keep a shop and to be an independent matron—nay, even a person of some importance—in Rayton village, than to be under her father's stern dominion in the south lodge. And yet it seemed a sorry ending of all those fine stories which had been told her by stray admirers, and by that perpetual comforter, her looking-glass. She wished she had not been so heartily tired of her father's rule, and the dulness of her life; that she could have afforded to wait a few years longer for that possible admirer looming in the future, whose advent so many of her admirers in the present had prophesied—the rich gentleman who would some day woo her for his wife. She had never read novels, and was perplexed by no sentimental foreshadowings. But she did cherish that one fond dream of a rich husband, and she did think it a hard thing that the wealthy wooer had not yet appeared, and that out of sheer weariness of spirit she must needs throw herself away upon a groom.

CHAPTER XXXVII

"THEN FELL UPON THE HOUSE A SUDDEN GLOOM."

LADY CLEVEDON'S invitations had been sent far and wide, to neighbours who were not tenants as well as to neighbours who were, and amongst other outsiders Richard Redmayne received one of the gilt-edged illuminated cards, prepared by a London lithographer from a design of Georgie's own. Colonel Davenant had insisted that even the invitation cards should be what he called "a feature."

Rick Redmayne, who had seemed to himself for a long time to exist outside the common joys and sorrows of mankind, put the gay-looking ticket into his breast-pocket with a brief laugh of scorn.

"As if such a thing was in my line," he said to himself; "but it was kind of Lady Clevedon to send it—and of course she didn't know. It Grace had been alive now——"

He could imagine himself going to the rustic festival with his daughter on his arm; could see her face as it would have looked amidst the summer holiday-making; could see the soft blue eyes brighten as they would have brightened at sight of the invitation card; could fancy how her childish soul would have been fascinated by the gold and colour, and how she would have treasured the card in her workbox as a relic when the fête was done. With her, he could have drunk the cup of simple pleasure to the dregs; without her, what could such a holiday seem to him but weariness and vexation?

He put the invitation in his pocket, and would have thought no more of the matter had he been permitted to think his own thoughts. This liberty, however, was not allowed him: it was impossible to exist during the week before Sir Francis Clevedon's birthday and not hear of the Clevedon fête. Even he who so rarely passed the boundaries of his own narrowed home, could not escape the popular agitation. Clevedon fête was the sauce which Mrs. Bush served with every meal she set before him. It was in vain that he professed his indifference. A mind overcharged as hers was would find some vent, and as her "goodman" was for the most part an absentee, Mr. Redmayne had the benefit of her intelligence. She could not set her foot beyond the garden, or take in a joint from the butcher, without hearing something about the Clevedon festivities. In the morning she heard for

the first time of the fireworks, and of the men who had come down from London to fix them; in the afternoon a neighbour brought her tidings of the lamps, from information received from that important functionary the village postman, who spoke with the voice of authority; lamps which were to be of divers colours, like the “inumlations” Mrs. Bush had seen in London at her Majesty’s coronation, when she was in service as nursemaid at Peckham Rye—lamps which, according to a privileged communication from the above-named postman, were to number upwards of a “milliond.”

Richard Redmayne heard so much about the festival, that at last, like the little old woman in Southey’s story of the Three Bears, he said a bad word about it.

“You shouldn’t lose your temper over it, Mr. Redmayne,” Mrs. Bush exclaimed, with friendly reproof. “What you ought to do is to go to Clevedon and enjoy yourself, like other people, for once in a way. I’m sure you’ve moped long enough here; and if it was ten thousand daughters you’d lost—not as I’m saying a word again Miss Gracey, which she was as sweet a young woman as ever stepped—you couldn’t have took the loss more to heart than you have took it. But there’s a time for all things, which I believe it was king Solomon hisself made the remark; leastways, I know I’ve heard it in Kingsbury Church, before Bush over-persuaded me into joining the Primitive Methodists; and if it wasn’t Solomon it must have been David, or Nebuchadnezzar. There’s a time for all things, Mr. Redmayne; and it isn’t the time to mope when everybody within twenty miles is going to be happy; and even me and Bush asked, through Bush’s brother being a tenant on the Clevedon estate. Mr. Wort brought me the card yesterday; not all gold and colour like yours, but a neat laylock, gilt-edged.”

Mr. Redmayne bore this remonstrance with tolerable patience, but had not the remotest idea of being influenced by it. Yet, when the much-expected morning dawned, serene and cloudless—for weather is sometimes propitious even in England; when the day grew older, and Kingsbury joy-bells rang gaily over woods and meadows, hopfields where the tender vines were climbing, cornfields where the golden wheat had ripened for the sickle, and where “the free and happy barley was smiling on the scythe,”—Mr. Redmayne could not help feeling that this day was not quite as other days, and that it was a dismal thing to stand alone and wilfully aloof from all his fellow-men on such a day as this.

If the day had been wet, if a chill gray sky had lowered on Sir Francis Clevedon and all his preparations for a festival, if a drizzling incessant rain had foreboded the extinction of lamps and fireworks. Mr. Redmayne might have smoked his pipe by

his desolate hearth in the old farmhouse kitchen, and laughed scornfully at the folly of his race, conjuring up a vision of sodden garments and disappointed faces, rain oozing slowly from the canvas roofs, the gay flag-bedecked tents transformed into gigantic shower-baths. But a misanthrope must have been of a very sour temper who could escape some touch of regret for his own lonely condition, some faint yearning for sympathy with his species, some feeble ghost-like renewal of old feelings, in such a golden noontide, and amidst so fair a landscape as that which lay around the home of Richard Redmayne. Several times had Mrs. Bush repeated her remonstrances, with every variety of rustic eloquence and much amplitude of speech, but to no effect. Mr. Redmayne declared most decisively that he would have no share in the day's rejoicings.

"A pretty figure I should cut amongst a pack of fools dancing and capering," he cried contemptuously. "I should seem like a ghost come from the grave."

Perhaps you might if you went in that shabby old shooting-jacket as you wear Sundays and work-a-days, which is a disgrace to a gentleman as well to do as you are," replied the plain-spoken Mrs. Bush, who seemed to think that the inhabitants of the spirit world might suffer from a want of good clothing "but not if you dressed yourself in some of the things you've got hoarded up in those two sea-chests of yours o' purpose for the moths, one 'ud think, to see the way you let 'em lie there. Now, do smarten yourself up a bit, and trim your whiskers, and all that, Mr. Redmayne, and don't be the only person within twenty miles of Cleveland to hang back from going. It looks so pined. It looks almost as if you had committed a murder, or somethink dreadful, and was afraid to face the light of day."

This last argument touched him a little, indifferent as he professed to be about the world's esteem. It was not of himself he thought even in this, but of that dead girl who had made up his world. Was he quite true to her memory in holding himself thus utterly aloof from his kind? Might he not by that very act have given occasion for slanders, which might never have arisen but for that, or which, at any rate, might have been crushed by his putting a bold front on matters, and finding some answer for every question that could be asked about his lost girl?

"Good God!" he said to himself, strangely affected by this random shot of Mrs. Bush's, "I may have made people think that things were worse than they really were, by my conduct."

He brooded on this idea a good deal; but it was scarcely this which influenced him on Sir Francis Clevedon's birthday, when, about an hour and a half after the Bushes had departed, radiant in their Sunday clothes, and with faces varnished by the

application of strong yellow soap, he suddenly made up his mind to follow them and share the pleasures of the day. They could be no pleasures to him. That was out of the question. But he would go among the noise and riot, and eating and drinking, and hold his own with the merriest, and let the world see that he was Rick Redmayne still, as good a man as he had been six years ago, before he sailed across the world to redeem his fortunes.

Strange how lonely the house seemed to him that summer day, when Mrs. Bush and her goodman had shut the door behind them, after much scudding to and fro and up and down at the last moment, in quest of forgotten trifles. It was not that he had ever affected Mrs. Bush's company, or that he had ever found her anything but an unmitigated bore. Yet no sooner was she departed than he sorely missed the clatter of her pattens, the cloop of her pails, the noise of her industrious broom sweeping assiduously in passages where there had been no footsteps to carry dirt. Dreary and empty beyond all measure seemed the old homestead, which had once been so blithe. He went in and out of the rooms without purpose, into that tabernacle of respectability the best parlour, where not so much as the position of a chair had been altered since his wedding day; where the chintz covers, which had been faded when he peered into the mystic chamber wonderingly, a baby in his mother's arms, were only a little paler and more feeble of tint to-day. Nothing could wear out in a room so seldom tenanted; it could only moulder imperceptibly with a gradual decay, like furniture in the sealed houses of some lava-buried city.

To-day that pale presence of the dead, whereby these rooms were always more or less haunted, smote him with a keener anguish than he could bear. The empty house was insupportable with that ghostly company.

"And yet, if she could take a palpable form and come back and smile upon me, God knows that I would welcome her fondly, even though I knew she were dead. Why cannot our dead come back to us sometimes, if only for one sweet solemn hour? Is God so hard that He will not lend them to us? O, Gracey, to have you with me for ever so brief a span, to hear from your own lips that heaven is fair and you are happy among the angels, to tell you how I have missed you! But there only comes the dull shadow, the dreary thought; no dear face, no gentle loving eyes."

Many and many a time he had sat in the sunshine, in the moonlight, lost in a waking dream, and wondering if Heaven would ever vouchsafe him a vision, such as men saw of old, when angelic creatures and the spirits of the dead seemed

nearer this earth than they are to-day. Many a time he had wished that the impalpable air would thicken and shape itself into the form he loved; but the vision never came. The rooms were haunted, but it was with bitter thoughts of the past; his sleep was broken, but only with confused patches of dreaming, in which the image of the beloved dead was entangled in some web of foolishness and bewilderment. Never had she appeared to him as he would have her come, serene and radiant with the radiance of a soul that wanders down from heaven to comfort an earthly mourner.

He went out into the garden and smoked a pipe under the cedar, but here too the solitude which had been the habit of his life lately seemed strangely intensified to-day. It might have been that sound of distant joy-bells, or the knowledge that all the little world within a twenty-mile radius was making merry so near him. It would be difficult to define the cause, but a sense of isolation crept into his mind. He smoked a second pipe, and drank a tumbler of spirit-and-water, that perilous restorer to which he had too frequent recourse of late; sat for an hour or more under the low-spreading branches which scarcely cleared his head when he stood upright, and then could endure this oppression of silence and loneliness no longer, and resolved to go to the Clevedon festival.

"I needn't join their tomfoolery," he said to himself; "I can look on."

He went up to his room, and dressed himself in some of those clothes which had lain so long idle in his sea-chest. He was a handsome man even now, in spite of the gloomy look that had become his natural expression; a fine-looking man still in spite of his bent shoulders; but he was only the wreck of the man he had been before his daughter's death; only the wreck of that man who sailed home from the distant world, fortunate and full of hope, coming back to his only child.

The dinner for the cottagers, farm-servants, gardeners, game-keepers, and small fry of all kinds was to begin at half-past one; the dinner for the superior tenantry, to which Mr. Redmayne was bidden, at three o'clock. He had plenty of time to walk to Clevedon before the banquet began, if he cared to take his place among the revellers, but he did not care about the ceremony of dining. He meant only to stroll about the park, take a distant view of the rejoicings, and walk home again in the twilight. The Bushes did not expect to return till midnight, as the fireworks, which were the great feature of the entertainment, were only to begin at ten; but Richard Redmayne had no idea of staying to stare at many-coloured sky-rockets, or showers of falling stars, or catherine wheels, or roman candles.

He took the short cut to Clevedon, the path that skirted

meadows and cornfields, by those tall hedgerows which had sheltered Grace and her lover in the fatal summer that was gone. Slowly and listlessly he went his way, stopping to lean against a stile and smoke a meditative pipe before his journey was half done; lingering to look at the ripened corn sometimes, with the critical eye of experience, but not with the keen interest of possession. Even if these acres had still been "in hand," it is doubtful whether he would have surveyed them with his old earnestness. The very key-stone of life's arch was gone. He had no motive for wishing to increase his store; hardly any motive for living, except that one undefined idea of a day of reckoning to come sooner or later betwixt him and his child's destroyer.

To-day, dawdling in the sunshine, amidst that peaceful landscape, going on such a purposeless errand, hardly knowing why he went, there was surely nothing farther from his thoughts than that the day of reckoning had come.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"OF ALL MEN ELSE I HAVE AVOIDED THEE."

PERHAPS, if a man must throw his money away somehow or other, which appears to be almost an absolute condition in the lives of most men, there is no pleasanter mode of scattering it than upon such a rustic carnival as Georgie Clevedon and her father had organised for the celebration of the baronet's twenty-ninth birthday. In that cup of pleasure one would suppose there can be scarcely one bitter drop, provided always that everybody within a certain distance is invited; that there is no forgotten fairy to mutter her maledictions in the midst of the banquet, and invoke misfortune upon the prince or princess of the house. And yet who can tell, even in that simple world, what heart-burnings may disturb the joy of Susan Jones at sight of Mary Smith's new gown, what a sense of humiliation may depress Mrs. Brown on beholding Mrs. Robinson in a new bonnet, while Brown's scanty wage has not afforded his partner so much as a yard of ribbon to smarten her faded head-gear? Or who shall presume to say that the jealous pangs which gnaw the entrails of some rustic Strephon at sight of his Chloe's flirtation with Damon are not as fierce an agony as the torments of any brilliant dandy in the Household Brigade distracted by the infidelities of a countess?

Sir Francis Clevedon did not consider the thing so deeply as

he looked out on the tents and flags and flowers and fountains and gaily-dressed crowd scattered over a vast green amphitheatre under the noontide sun—a cheerful picture framed by a background of old forest trees, amidst whose cool umbrage the scared deer had fled for sanctuary. He thought that Georgie had hit upon a very pleasant manner of fooling away two or three hundred pounds, whatever Mr. Wort—with a pencil behind his ear and an ancient little account-book in his hand—might say to the contrary.

"You're sure you're pleased, then, Frankie?" says Georgie, in her little coaxing way, sidling up to her husband as she stands by him on the terrace-walk before the house, looking down at the crowd. "I should be quite miserable if you didn't like it all. You see, it seems such a dreadful thing for you to marry a girl without sixpence, and for her to begin by spending your money at such a rate; but, then, it's only once a year, and it's all for your sake, so I do hope you're pleased."

"As if I could help being pleased with you in that bonnet," said Frank, surveying the bright face framed in white azaleas and blonde. Georgie is in white to-day, an airy sylph-like costume, in which she looks scarcely seventeen. Sibyl is near her, also in white, dotted about with little bouquets of forget-me-nots, and with forget-me-nots in her bonnet; and Sibyl is very agreeably occupied in a flirtation with her brother's friend, Captain Harwood of the Engineers. The Clevedon guests from outside have not yet begun to arrive; the visitors in the house circulate languidly—looking out of windows, or sauntering up and down the terrace, watching that crowd of creatures of an inferior order from afar, with a kind of mildly curious interest which one might feel about common objects by the sea-shore, and with hardly any more sense of affinity than one has with a jelly-fish or any other invertebrate animal.

"I am so glad they have a nice day, poor dear things," said Mrs. Cheviot, who was good-natured, but not of the district-visiting order, and who had no personal acquaintance with these belots.

"Yes," drawled Weston, "I suppose we ought to be pleased for their sakes; but it would have been more fun to see them struggling in the rain with umbrellas. I was at York summer meeting the year that Moor-hen was expected to win, but didn't; and the rain was incessant, and I can assure you the people on the shilling stands and places were very good fun. I think we should have had more amusement to-day if the weather had been bad; to see the girls dancing in pattens—a *pas de pattens*—would have been capital."

"I suppose that's what they mean by a patten fair?" said the

youngest Miss Stalman; "because it always rains in Ireland, you know."

Mrs. Harcross sat in a garden-chair near this group, and looked listlessly at the people in the park, sauntering to and fro to the music of a local brass band braying out the march from Gounod's *Faust* in abominable time, with a kind of staggering sound, as if a regiment of gigantic toy-soldiers were lifting their clumsy wooden legs to the music. There was a good deal of talk and merriment already among the rural visitors. An Aunt Sally had been set up under the trees, and the lads of the village were pelting the grim old lady's visage; but every one felt that dinner was to be the first great event of the day, and that everything before dinner was merely preliminary and unimportant. The tenants, whose appetites had been sharpened by a longish drive through the morning air, were rather inclined to envy the peasantry their earlier meal; but, then, there was a satisfaction in knowing that their banquet would be a joy in the present when the plebeian feast was only a memory of the past.

Very bitter were the thoughts of Augusta Harcross as she looked across that festive crowd—the tenants and retainers who should have been the tenants and retainers of her husband. She did not grudge Sir Francis Clevedon the cheap popularity of to-day; indeed, she considered the whole business a foolish and frivolous waste of money. Not such renown as might be won by hogsheads of ale and roasted oxen did she desire for her husband, nor would she have valued the commonplace distinction of a Lady Bountiful for herself. She thought of what Hubert might have made of these advantages which Sir Francis held to so little purpose. She thought of him not wasting his powers upon the dryasdust arguments of law-courts or committee-rooms, but mounting that splendid ladder of statesmanship whereby a man achieves that renown which must ever seem the chiefest of earthly glory to the British mind. Now he spent his labour for that which profited him naught, since committee-rooms and arbitration cases, though remunerative enough in a sordid sense, were hardly on the high road to the woolsack; but with six or seven thousand a year of his own, and the status of landowner, it would have been different. Such an income, augmented by hers, would have enabled him to hold any position.

"He shall go into parliament next session," she said to herself. "He *shall* win a name that men will respect. I will not let myself be crushed by this horrid secret. A barrister's fame is so common. I might be proud of him, if he were to distinguish himself in the political world; I might be proud of him, in spite of what I know."

It was a strangely blended sentiment of selfish shame and regret.

ful affection for him. If she had loved him less, she might have felt her own wrong less bitterly; but she did love him, and she was sorry for him, and there was a relenting tenderness in her mind, even in the face of that coolness between them, which she would have been the last woman in the world to dispel by any word or act of hers. She had no fear that their estrangement would be a matter of very long duration. He would humble himself, of course, sooner or later; and when he had done so, when he had fully repented himself of this tacit rebellion, she would receive the prodigal, and propose the seat in parliament, and a partial cessation from his legal labours. She would remind him of a fact which had been perhaps too much ignored by both—that her fortune was his fortune, and that the renown which he might achieve by a disinterested pursuit of fame would be dearer to her than any of those sordid successes which were only estimable by the amount of pounds shillings and pence that they brought with them.

She meant to do this all in good time. She was not an enthusiast, who, on being inspired by a new idea, runs off flushed and eager to communicate it to the ear of sympathy. She made up her mind with deliberation, and allowed her purpose to incubate, as it were, in the silent calmness of her soul. She felt that she was taking a generous—nay, even noble—view of her husband's position, and that he could not fail to receive her proposition with ready assent and some gratitude.

"There are women who would part from him for ever after such a discovery," she said to herself; and such a parting had indeed been her first thought, strangled in its birth by the consideration of the world's wonder. Mrs. Harcross was a person who could not permit the world to wonder about her.

Mr. Harcross had his duties as steward; and before one o'clock, he and Captain Hardwood, Weston Vallory, and Mr. M'Gall the reviewer were amongst the crowd, duly blue-ribboned and rose-budded. Weston found his way to Miss Bond, radiant in her pink dress. She had contrived to slip her moorings from her father's arm; and while that seriously-minded gentleman was arguing on the subject of justification by faith with another seriously-minded gentleman, Jane had drifted as far away from him as she could, and was receiving the compliments of rural swains, with all the more freedom on account of the enforced absence of Mr. Flood, who was on duty in the stables at this hour, assisting in the putting-up of wagonettes and whitechapel carts. The baronches and landaus and omnibuses of the gentry were only just beginning to arrive.

Jane welcomed Mr. Vallory with a blush and a simper. Her rural admirers were very soon made to feel themselves at a disadvantage beside this splendid London dandy, and shambled

off with a sense of defeat and discomfiture to console themselves with a "shy" at Aunt Sally.

"How charming you look in that pink gown!" said Weston, surveying the damsel with his bold stare; "it's the prettiest costume I've seen to-day."

"I'm glad you like it," the girl answered. "I bought it with your present; but of course I daredn't tell father so. He'd have turned me out of doors, I think, if he'd found out as I'd taken that sovering."

"Then you shall not run the risk of expulsion again, for when I give you another present, it shall be a gown of my own choosing."

"O no, nor that wouldn't do neither; leastways, father would be sure to find out if I were to get a new gown like that. I had to tell him a fib about this one—that I'd saved up my money to buy it. He does give me a shilling once in a way; but he's dreadful near. I know I didn't ought to have taken that money from you; but I did so want to buy something new for to-day, and it seemed to come so handy."

"Sweet simplicity!" said Weston, with his artificial smile. "There are women in London with not half your attractions whose milliners' bills come to five hundred a year; and are sometimes paid, too."

He strolled by Miss Bond's side under the trees, thinking this the pleasantest part of his stewardship. Mr. Harcross met them face to face presently, and marked his friend Weston's rustic flirtation as he went by, in conversation with one of the chief tenants, a stalwart farmer of the genuine *Speed-the-Plough* type, to whom he had been specially introduced by Sir Francis, and who volunteered to support him as vice-chairman at the dinner-table. The stewards had drawn lots for the tables at which they were to preside, and Mr. Harcross's lot had fallen on one of the tables at the earlier and humbler banquet.

"I'll stand by you, Mr. Chairman," said Mr. Holby, the farmer; "I think I know everybody within ten mile of Kingsbury, man, woman, and child; and all I wish is, that there was enough of 'em to gather my hops without employing any of these here Irish tramps."

"You belong to Kingsbury, do you, Mr. Holby?" Hubert Harcross asked, with a thoughtful face, when he had done a good deal of duty talk about corn and hops.

"Higgs's farm, sir, within a mile of Kingsbury Church. I've farmed that land of Sir Francis's ever since old Higgs died, which is above seven-and-thirty year ago."

"Higgs's farm; yes, I remember. That's not far from a place called Brierwood, is it?"

"Not above two mile. I've walked it many a time between

tea and supper, when Richard Redmayne was a pleasanter kind of fellow than he is now, twelve or fifteen year ago, when his daughter that died was only a little lass not higher than that."

He held his sunburnt hand a yard or so from the ground, looking downward fondly as if he could see the fair head of that little lass as he had seen it years ago.

Who could have thought that it would be so sharp a pain only to hear of these things? Mr. Harcross felt as if a knife had gone through his heart. It was some moments before he could speak. O God, to think of her a little innocent child, and that she should have been predestined to love him dearly, and to die broken-hearted for his sin!

He would have let the subject drop at once, as a theme unspeakably painful, had he not been eager to satisfy himself upon one point. There had been something in the farmer's speech which mystified him not a little.

"You spoke of Richard Redmayne as if you had seen him lately," he said; "I understood the whole family had emigrated."

"Ay, ay," answered the farmer, with ponderous slowness; "the family did emigrate—Jim and his wife, and the two boys, tall well-grown lads as you could see anywhere. They went out to Australia, where Richard had bought a stiffish bit of land, I've heard say, for about a tenth part the price an acre as you'd give in these parts. They went out, Jim, his wife, and boys, soon after Richard's daughter died. She died away from home, you see, sir, and there was a good deal of trouble about it; and I don't believe as anybody hereabouts knows azactly the rights and wrongs of that story; and it's my idea as there was more wrongs than rights in it."

Whereupon Mr. Harcross had to hear the story of Grace Redmayne's death, delivered conjecturally, oy Mr. Holby of Higgs's farm, after a rambling fashion, with much commentary.

"It were a sad loss for poor Rick, sir; for she was as sweet a young woman as ever stept," concluded the farmer.

Mr. Harcross was compelled to repeat his question.

"I asked you if Mr. Redmayne was still in Australia," he said.

"Ay, ay, to be sure, to be sure. No, not Rick Redmayne. Jim and his wife and boys are over yonder, but Richard come home the other day, as changed a man as I ever saw. Him and me used to have many a pleasant hour together of a summer evening, with a pipe of tobacco and a jug of home-brewed. But that's all over now. He hasn't been anigh his friends since he come back; and he lets his friends see pretty plain as he don't want them to go anigh him."

"He is at home, then—at Brierwood f"

"Yes. I saw him standing by the gate the night before last, as I drove home from market."

To say that this intelligence awakened anything like fear in Hubert Harcross's mind would be to do him injustice. He was not the kind of man to fear the face of his fellow-man. But the knowledge that Richard Redmayne was near at hand filled him with a vague horror nevertheless. "Of all men else I have avoided thee." True that even if they met face to face, there was little chance of his being recognised by Grace's father. That foolish gift, the locket with his likeness in it, had been lost. Grace had told him that during the brief dreamlike railway journey betwixt Tunbridge and London, when she had sat with her hand in his, confessing all the sadness of her life without him. Strange to look back upon it all, and think of himself, almost as if he had been some one else outside that sorrowful story; to think of himself and all he had hoped for and looked forward to that day, when he had deemed it possible to serve two masters, to hold his appointed place in the world, and yet make for himself one sweet and secret sanctuary remote from all worldly influences.

No, that schoolboy love-token, the locket, being happily gone, there was no fear of any recognition on the part of the farmer, even if they were to meet; nor under the name of Harcross could Richard Redmayne suspect the presence of Walgrave. "So, for once in a way, that absurd change of name is an advantage," thought Mr. Harcross.

The first dinner-bell rang while he was holding this review of the situation, a cheery peal, which brightened the faces of all the early diners. Colonel Davenant would fain have fired a cannon as the signal of the feast; but this idea not being received favourably, was obliged to content himself with the great alarm-bell, which hung in a cupola above the hall, and a fine old Indian gong, which had been brought out upon the lawn, where the Colonel himself officiated, with very much the air of an enterprising showman at a country fair.

"Now, Harcross," he cried presently, swooping down upon the barrister as he sauntered under the trees beside Mr. Holby of Higgs's farm,—“now, Harcross, you know your tent, don't you, old fellow, the one with the blue flags? Your people are pouring in already. You really ought to be in your place, you know; come along."

"Be in time," said Mr. Harcross, laughing; "just agoing to begin."

He shook off all thoughts of Grace Redmayne's father, for the moment at least, but not without an effort, and made his way to the blue-flag-bedecked marquee, attended by his esquire, Farmer Holby.

"You must propose almost all the toasts, Mr. Holby," he said, in his careless way; "for I really haven't a notion of what I am expected to do."

This was hardly fair to Colonel Davenant, who had existed for the last week with a pencil in one hand and a pocket-book in the other, and had drawn up elaborate plans of the tables, with everybody's appointed place thereat—so that no rural Capulet should find himself seated next his detested Montague, no village Ghibelline discover a Guelph in his neighbour—and made out lists of all the health-proposing and thanks-giving with as much brown study and mental hard labour as if he had been endeavouring to discover the "differentiate between the finite and the infinite," which the Yankee lady was lately reported to have hit upon. What pains he had taken to coach Mr. Harcross in his duties! And it had all come to this!

Clevedon lawn at beat of gong was a pretty sight. There were all the elements of an agreeable picture—balmy summer weather, snow-white tents, many-coloured flags fluttering gaily in the sunshine, a crowd of happy people, an atmosphere of eating and drinking, and for a background the fine old red-brick house, with its stone mullions and cornices, and quaint pinnacles standing out in sharp relief against a sky that was bluer than the skies that canopy an English scene are wont to be. But fair as the scene might be without, perhaps the hungry villagers crowding into the tents thought the scene within much pleasanter. What could be more picturesque than those ponderous sirloins; those Gargantuan rounds, with appropriate embellishment of horse-radish and parsley;—those dainty fowls—fowls even for the commonalty—those golden-crusts pies, with pigeons' feet turned meekly upward, as in mute protest against their barbarous murder, pies whose very odour from afar off was to distraction savoury; that delicate pigling, slain untimely; those forequarters of adolescent sheep, which were still by courtesy lamb; those plump young geese, foredoomed to die before their legitimate hour? What contrast of colour could be more delightful than that presented by the mellow Indian-red and burnt-sienna hues of the meat and poultry against the cool tender greens of the salads, the golden yolks of eggs in rings of virgin white, the paler gold of the gigantic French loaves, baked on purpose for the festival, from which a man might cut a quarter of a yard or so without making any serious difference in the bulk of the whole?

At one end of the tent, and conveniently near the chairman's elbow, there was a small colony of beer-barrels, and a stack of wines and spirits, as neatly arranged and as amply provided as in the lazaret of an East Indiaman. Over these it was Mr. Harcross's duty to preside, assisted by the under butler.

He found himself seated in his place presently, amidst a tremendous shuffling of feet, and scrooping of benches, and whispering, and subdued tittering, as the guests arranged themselves, under the all-directing eye of the Colonel, who had appointed himself commander-in-chief or generalissimo of all the tables.

"Silence, if you please, ladies and gentlemen! silence for grace!" he roared in stentorian accents, which might have made his fortune as a toastmaster; whereat a very mild-looking gentleman, with a white cravat and long straight hair, whom Mr. Harcross had not observed before, rose at the other end of the tent, and invoked a blessing upon the banquet, which was almost as long as his hair. Directly it was over there arose a general gasp, as of relief, and then a tremendous clattering of knives and forks.

The Colonel walked round the tent, calling attention to the different viands.

"There's a magnificent sirloin yonder, ma'am, roasted to a turn," he said confidentially to a ponderous matron; "I should recommend you a plate of *that*. And if you, my love, have any taste for roast goose," he went on to a blushing damsel next but one, "there's as fine a bird as was ever hatched just before you. Which gentleman on this side of the table will undertake to cut up a goose?" And so on, and so on, with variations, continued the Colonel, till he had made the round of one tent and shot off to do his duty in the other.

Mr. Harcross, in a much more subdued manner, made himself agreeable to the company. He saw that all glasses were duly filled with sparkling ale, or the more sustaining porter; he administered sherry to the fairer sex, and kept an eye even on distant diners. The rural population proving unequal to the manipulation of carving-knives and forks, he sent for one joint after another, and demolished them with a quiet dexterity which, to these wondering rustics, appeared a species of legerdemain. He did more carving in half an hour than he ever remembered to have accomplished in his life before, since his lot had fallen in the days of vicarious carving, and he contrived to keep up a running flirtation all the time with the young lady seated on his left hand. He had an old woman in a black bonnet on his right, the most ancient female in Kingsbury parish, who was reputed to have used the first mangle ever seen in those parts, and to have been the last person to ride pillion.

This honourable matron being stone deaf, the attentions of Mr. Harcross were necessarily confined to a careful provision for her creature comforts. He supplied her with tender breasts of chicken and the crumbiest pieces of bread he could obtain, and devoutly hoped that she would mumble her share of the feast.

without choking herself. Having performed these charitable offices, he was free to devote his conversational powers to his left-hand neighbour, who was young and handsome, and was, moreover, the very young person he had seen engaged in a flirtation with Weston Vallory.

Mr. Harcross was in that mood in which a man is ready for any immediate amusement, however puerile, that may serve to divert his mind from painful memories—for any excitement, however vulgar, which may help to numb the slow agony of remorse. There was no pleasure to him in talking shallow nonsense with this low-born beauty, but the rattle and the laughter and the wine made up some kind of relief. He took a good deal more wine than he was accustomed to take at that time of day; he talked more than he was in the habit of talking, until he shone out in a gentlemanly way at the eight-o'clock dinner; and the talk and the wine together kept him from thinking of Richard Redmayne. He did not glance round the table with fearful eyes, dreading to see that fatal unknown figure appear, Banquo-like, amidst the revellers. That most unwelcome discovery which he had made by means of Mr. Holby the farmer had left only an undefined sense of discomfort—a feeling that there was trouble near.

Miss Bond, in the meantime, was very well pleased with her position and surroundings. In the first place, it was a grand thing for her to be in the post of honour, next the gentleman-steward, to which place she had drifted in the general confusion, while more timid maidens hung back upon the arms of kindred or lovers, waiting to be pushed into their seats; and in the second place, it was a pleasant thing to have disappointed Weston Vallory, who had expressed his desire that she should sit next him in the tent with the red flags; and lastly, it was a still more delightful thing to inspire jealousy and gloom in the breast of her faithful Joseph Flood, who had been released from his duties in time for the banquet, and who sat divided from his betrothed by half-a-dozen banqueters, glaring at her savagely, in silent indignation at her coquetry.

"This is the fine gentleman from London that she talked about," he said to himself; and in his estimation Mr. Harcross suffered for all the sins of Weston Vallory. "I reckon she'll scarcely open her lips to me all the afternoon, as long as she can get him to talk to."

Miss Bond was conscious of her lover's baleful glances, and improved the occasion, bringing all her fascinations to bear upon Mr. Harcross. The rustic feast would have been a slow business without this amusement. There was a great deal of talk, and still more laughter, inextinguishable laughter, at the feeblest and most threadbare jokes. The conversation was that of people

who seemed to have no memory of the past, no consideration for the future—a people existing as entirely in the present hour as if they had been bovine creatures without consciousness of yesterday. Their little jokes, their friendly facetiousness had a mechanical air, and seemed almost as wooden as the clumsy furniture of their cottages, handed down from generation to generation.

Mr. Harcross's previous experience of this class had been entirely confined to the witness-box; but he found that as in the witness-box, so were they in social life. "And yet I suppose there are fine characters, or the material for fine characters, among them," he thought in one of the pauses of his flirtation, as he contemplated the curious faces—some stolid and expressionless, some solemn and important, some grinning with a wooden grin. "I suppose there is the same proportion of intellect amongst a given number of these people as among the same number of men bred at Westminster and Oxford, if one could penetrate the outer husk, make due allowance for the differences of habit and culture, and get at the kernel within. Or is the whole thing a question of blood, and mankind subject to the same laws which govern the development of a racehorse? I wonder how many dormant Bunyans and Burnses there may be in such an assembly as this."

He had not much time for idle conjectures at this stage of the entertainment, for the toasts followed one another fast and furiously.

The loyal and ceremonial toasts, "Sir Francis Clevedon, Lady Clevedon, and Miss Clevedon," "Colonel Davenant," "John Wort," the steward, "Mr. Holby," the oldest and most important tenant, who had condescended to take a seat at this inferior table, when his rank entitled him to the best place at the superior board—all these and sundry other toasts were proposed in discreet and appropriate language by Hubert Harcross, with much secret weariness of spirit; and after every toast there was a long lumbering speech from some one in acknowledgment thereof. Mr. Harcross thought these people would never have done eating and drinking, that this health-proposing and thanks-returning would never come to an end. It was only half-past three when all was over, and he came out of the tent amidst the crowd with Jane Bond by his side, but it seemed to him as if the business had lasted a day and a night.

The local band had brayed itself breathless, and had retired to refresh itself in one of the tents; and now the band from London began to scrape its fiddles, and tighten the strings of its violoncello, and juggle mysteriously with little brass screws in its cornets, preparatory to performing the newest dance music for the rest of the afternoon.

"You must keep the last waltz for me," said Mr. Harcross, casting himself on the grass at the feet of Miss Bond, who had seated herself on a bench under the trees. "I feel as if I should not be equal to anything before that. What a relief it is to get into the open air and smell the pine trees after the atmosphere of that tent! I felt the thermometer rising as it must have done in the Black Hole."

"I don't know how to waltz," replied Miss Bond, casting down her eyes. "Father has always set his face against dancing; but I know the Lancers and the Caledonians. I learnt the figures out of a book."

"Then we'll dance the Lancers," Mr. Harcross said with a yawn, "though it is the most idiotic performance ever devised for the abasement of mankind. What would Dog-ribs or Rocky Mountain Indians think of us, if they saw us dancing the Lancers? I believe the Dog-ribs have a dance of their own, by the way, a dance of amity, which is performed when friends meet after long severance, and which lasts two days at a stretch—a dance which, I take it, must be something of the Lancer or Caledonian species."

He closed his eyes, and slumbered for a few minutes peacefully, as he had often slept in law-courts and committee-rooms, while the band from London played a good honest country dance. He had no very precise idea of the duties of his stewardship, or what more might be required of him. He might be wanted to dance with the oldest woman of the party, or the youngest, or the prettiest, or the ugliest; but he was not inclined to give himself any farther trouble, and if Colonel Davenant had any new task to impose upon him, he would have to come and find him. There was a soothing sensation in the touch of that soft warm turf, in the odoriferous breathing of the pine trees, stirred gently by a light summer wind. He thought of that other holiday afternoon at Clevedon, and a vision of Grace Redmayne rose before him in her pale young beauty. O God, if he could have opened his eyes to find himself at *her* feet! He thought of those two mournful lines which Southey quotes in the *Doctor*:

"O, if in after life we could but gather
The very refuse of our youthful hours!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"THOU ART THE MAN."

At three o'clock the gentry went to luncheon in the great dining-room. They had been arriving from one o'clock upwards, and had spent the interval in sauntering about the upper part of the

lawn, gazing from a respectful distance at the happy rustics very much as they might have done at animals in cages. It is possible that this amusement, even when eked out by conversation and croquet, and enlivened by the strains of the local band, may have somewhat palled upon the county families, and that the signal for the patrician banquet was a welcome relief. However this might be, the spirits of Sir Francis Clevedon's friends rose perceptibly in the banquet-hall. Incipient flirtations, which had only budded feebly on the lawn, burst into full blossom under the influence of sparkling wines, and that delightfully bewildering concert of voices produced by three-and-twenty different *tête-à-têtes* all going on at once. Georgie was eminently happy as she sat opposite her adored Francis, at this their first large party, for she felt that the fête was a success, and the eye of the county was upon them.

All the windows were open, and the cheering from the tents on the lawn mingled not unpleasantly with the merry confusion of voices within. It was a nice thing to know that these poor creatures who were not in society were for once enjoying themselves.

"How strange it must seem to them to taste champagne!" said the pretty Miss Stalman to her latest admirer; "I wonder if they are afraid it will go off and blow them up, like gunpowder."

"Don't know, I'm shaw," replied the gentleman; "but I should imagine they were hardly up to it. They'll take it for a superior kind of beer. Champagne is a question of education, you see. There are people who believe implicitly in any wine that'll blow a cork out of a bottle."

It was nearly three o'clock when Mr. Redmayne presented his card of admission at the south lodge, guarded to-day by an official from the Tunbridge police-office who gave him a secondary ticket printed on pink tissue paper, which was to admit him to the tenants' marquee.

"You'd better look sharp, sir," said this official in a friendly tone; "the tenants' dinner was to begin at three o'clock punctual."

"I didn't mean to dine," Richard answered dubiously; "I only came to look about a little."

"Not go in to dinner, Mr. Redmayne!" exclaimed the policeman, who knew the master of Brierwood by sight; "and it's to be as fine a dinner as ever was eaten. Sure to goodness, you'd never be so foolish!"

Mr. Redmayne gave him a nod and went on, pledging himself to nothing. He thought he could stroll about on the outskirts of the crowd, and see as much of the festival as he cared to see, without joining in any of the festivities. But when he came to

the lawn where the revelry was held, he found himself pounced upon by the ubiquitous Colonel, who was marshalling the tenants to their places, and who seized upon his pink-paper ticket and examined it eagerly.

"No. 53," he exclaimed; "the seats are all numbered. If you'll follow those ladies and gentlemen, sir, into that tent. Keep your ticket, the stewards are inside. Go on, sir, if you please." And not caring to remonstrate, Richard Redmayne went the way Fate drifted him, and found himself presently seated at the board between two strangers, cheered by that inspiring melody, "The Roast Beef of Old England."

The dinner in the tenants' marquee did not differ materially from the humbler banquet of the villagers. The viands were of a more opicurean character: there were savoury jellies, and raised pies, and lobster salads, as a relief to the rounds and sirloins, and there were no such vulgarities as goose or sucking-pig. There were tartlets and cheese-cakes, and creams and blanchmanges, and glowing pyramids of hot-house grapes and wall-fruit for the feminine banqueters, and there were sparkling wines and bottled ales in abundance. There was the same crescendo of multitudinous voices, and the jokes, though somewhat more refined than the humour of the villagers, had the same rustic flavour.

Richard Redmayne had of late found it easier to drink than to eat; so he did scanty justice to sirloin or savoury pie, but made up the deficiency by a considerable consumption of champagne, a wine he had learnt to drink in his gold-digging days, when the lucky digger was wont to "shout"—that is to say, pay the shot—for the refreshment of his comrades. He sat in moody silence, amidst all that talk and laughter, and drank and thought of his troubles.

They had been brought sharply home to him by the presence of John Wort, who sat at the bottom of the table, while Colonel Davenant took the chair at the top. He had not spoken to the steward since that night in his office, and the sight of him set him thinking of his wrongs with renewed bitterness.

"He knew the man," he said to himself. "He brought him to my house. But for him my little girl might be with me to-day."

It was a bitter thought, not to be drowned in the vintage of Perrier or Moët. The man went on drinking, uncheered by the wine, growing gloomier, rather, as he drank.

The toasts had not yet begun. Sir Francis was to bid his guests welcome before that ceremony was entered upon. It was about half-past four, when there was a little buzz and movement at the entrance of the marquee, and a great many people stood up, as if a monarch had appeared among them.

Richard Redmayne looked up listlessly enough, not having the keen personal interest of the tenants, to whom this man's favour was to be as the sun itself, diffusing light and heat. He looked up and saw a tall slim young man coming slowly along on the opposite side of the table, stopping to speak to one, and to shake hands with another, and ready with a pleasant greeting for all; a darkly handsome face, smiling kindly, while all the assembly stood at gaze.

After that one careless upward glance, Richard Redmayne sat staring at the new comer, motionless, nay almost breathless, as a man of stone. Had not those very lineaments been bitten into the tablet of his mind with the corroding acid of hate? The face was a face which he had seen in many of his dreams of late. The face of a man with whom he had grappled, hand to hand and foot to foot, in many a visionary struggle—a countenance he had hardly hoped to look upon in the flesh. It was the very face which he had pored upon so often, in that foolish toy, his dead girl's locket. He had the thing in his breast to-day, fastened to his watch ribbon.

"What! was *he* the man?" he said to himself at last, drawing a long slow breath!

Was this the man—Sir Francis Clevedon? In that sudden light of conviction, Richard Redmayne began to wonder that he had never guessed as much as this: the man who came to Brierwood, recommended and guaranteed by John Wort: the man who had free access to Clevedon, and whom Wort had seemed anxious in every respect to oblige. He remembered that stormy interview in the little office at Kingsbury, and John Wort's endeavour to shield the delinquent. Yes, the murder was out. This hero of the hour, upon whom all the world was smiling, was the destroyer of his child.

The savage thirst for vengeance which took possession of him on this discovery was tempered by no restraining influence. For years past all his thoughts and dreams and desires had tended to one deadly end. Whatever religious sentiments he had cherished in his youth—and very few young men with innocent surroundings are irreligious—had been withered by this soul-blasting grief. Nor had his Australian experience been without an evil effect upon his character. It had made a naturally careless disposition reckless to lawlessness. Of all the consequences which might tread upon the heels of any desperate act of his he took no heed. He reasoned no more than a savage might have reasoned; but having, as he thought, found his enemy, his whole being was governed by but one consideration, as to the mode and manner of that settlement which must come between them.

He sat in his place and meditated this question, while Sir Francis Clevedon made his way round the table. It was a some

what protracted journey, for the Baronet had something particular to say to a great many of his tenants: he had set his heart upon holding a better place in their estimation than his father had held, on being something more to them than an absorbent of rents. He talked to the matrons, and complimented the daughters; and had a good deal to say about harvest and hopping, and the coming season of field sports, to the fathers and sons. What a herd of sycophants those people seemed to Richard Redmayne's jaundiced soul as they paid their honest homage to the proprietor of their homesteads, and what a hypocrite the squire who received their worship!

"Does he mean to break the hearts of any of *their* daughters?" he thought, as he saw the matrons smiling up at him, the maidens downcast and blushing.

Sir Francis was close behind him presently, and paused for a moment to glance at that one sullen figure which did not move as he passed—only for a moment, there were so many to speak to. The man's potations had been a trifle too deep, perhaps.

The man drank deeper before the banquet was over. He went on drinking in his gloomy silent way, during that lengthy ceremonial of toast-proposing. Sir Francis had stood at the end of the table by John Wort, and made a cheery little speech to set them going, and then had slipped away, leaving the Colonel, who loved all manner of speechification, in his glory. How he hammered at the toasts, heaping every hyperbolical virtue upon the head of his subject!—that honourable, noble-hearted, worthy English farmer, Mr. A., whom they all knew and esteemed, and whom it was a proud thing to know, and an impossible thing not to esteem, and who, &c. &c.

"As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,
Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm;
Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head."

What little gushes of sentiment welled from the kindly Colonel's lips; what scraps of poetry more or less appropriate, but always applauded to the echo; what swelling adjectives rolled off his fluent tongue; and how the champagne corks flew, and the honest brown sherry—a sound sustaining wine—shrank in the decanters!

Richard Redmayne sat it all out, though the talk and laughter, the cheering and jolly-good-fellowing, made little more than a mere Babel sound in his ears. He sat on, not caring to draw people's attention upon him by an untimely departure; sat on drinking brandy-and-water, and having no more fellowship with the feasters than if he had been the skull at an Egyptian banquet.

At last the revelry, or this stage of the revelry, was over, and the tenants left their tent. Dancing had been in full progress for some time among the humbler guests, and the wide lawn in the evening sunlight presented a pretty picture of village festivity: the music of an old-fashioned country dance was sounding gaily, a long line of figures threading the needle—the women in bright-coloured gowns and ribbons, the men with gaudy neckerchiefs and light waistcoats—all moving, all full of life and colour, the low western sun shining on them, the joy-bells of Kingsbury Church ringing a vesper peal.

Sir Francis was standing on the outskirts of the lawn, with his wife on his arm, watching the dancers. They moved slowly away as Richard Redmayne crossed the grass on his way towards them. His quick eye had seen that hated figure, and he went across the lawn intending to speak to his enemy, even in that place and at that time.

His wrath had kept for years, and had strengthened with his nursing; but he was not a man to delay the time of reckoning by so much as an hour. He had no clear idea of what he meant to say, nor had his libations in the tent conduced to clearness of brain; but he knew that he meant to denounce Francis Clevedon before the face of all the world.

"I'll let them know what a noble gentleman they've got for their landlord," he said to himself. "I'll stop all their humbug and palaver, and make them sing to a different tune. I should think the fathers that have only daughters will turn their backs upon him, anyhow."

He followed Sir Francis and his wife at a respectful distance as they strolled slowly towards the house, biding his time, but meaning to come up with them presently. They did not go in by the chief entrance, but by an iron wicket leading into the garden, which lay at one side of the Hall, and extended for a long way behind it. They had disappeared behind the angle of the house by the time Mr. Redmayne came to this gate. He entered the garden, however, and went round to the back of the house.

The library was on this side of Clevedon Hall. Its five windows opened on the grass-plots and flowerbeds, and commanded a view of the fish-pond, where there were gold and silver fish in abundance now—happy fish, which were fed every morning by Georgie's hand. A huge gray cockatoo—a wedding present from the Colonel to his daughter—was screaming on its perch before an open glass door. This was the only open door Richard Redmayne could see, as he cast a quick look along the house. He crossed the grass-plot with a rapid footstep, and looked into the room.

After the vivid sunshine out of doors the Clevedon library had

a dusky look. The walls had been lined by Clevedons of a more studious temper than the baronets of later generations. From floor to ceiling the room was filled with books, and massive oaken bookcases, seven feet high, stood out from the walls, dividing the chamber into various nooks and recesses, or pens rather, where a student might pore over some ancient volume in the strictest solitude, although the centre of the room were ever so well occupied. It seemed a darksome apartment to Richard Redmayne as he peered in, with his back to the garden and the sunlight. Those walls of brown-backed folios and quartos, enlivened here and there by a row of duodecimos in faded crimson morocco, or a little batch of octavos in vellum, had a sober air that was almost gloomy. There was none of the costliness and luxury of binding which render modern libraries things of beauty. The volumes had been collected in an age when it was the fashion to make the outsides of books as repulsive as possible; when knowledge was for the privileged classes, and the solemn muses of history and poetry, and the graver geniuses of philosophy and science, disdained to make themselves attractive by meretricious arts in the way of outward adornment.

Richard Redmayne gave a hasty glance round the room, and thought that it was "unked;" and then seeing a white dress near a distant door, which he took to be Lady Clevedon's, stepped boldly in.

The lady by the door turned at the sound of the farmer's footstep on the uncarpeted oak floor. It was Georgie, who had been in the act of leaving the room as the intruder entered. She looked at him with a little surprise, but without alarm. It was scarcely strange that unknown figures should be wandering about to-day.

"You are looking for some one, I suppose," she said, with her pretty smile.

"Yes, I am looking for Sir Francis Clevedon."

"He was here scarcely a minute ago; but I don't think you can see him just yet. He has gone to the billiard-room with General Cheviot. Is it anything very particular you have to say to him?"

She fancied the strange man must be one of the tenants, who wanted his roof repaired, perhaps, or new pigsties, and who chose this inappropriate occasion for the preferment of his request.

"It is something very particular," said Richard, in a strange voice; "I never thought to see Sir Francis Clevedon's face as I have seen it to-day."

The strangeness of the words, as well as of the man's tone and manner, startled her. He was deadly pale, too; she could see that, although he stood with his back to the light.

He had been taking too much champagne, perhaps; that was the most natural explanation of the business. What a horrible situation, to be left alone in this great room with a dreadful tipsy farmer! Poor Georgie gave a little shudder, and moved hastily towards the door.

"I will send some one to tell my husband you want to see him," she said, in a conciliating tone, "if you'll be good enough to sit down and wait."

"Don't go, Lady Clevedon. Perhaps I'd better tell *you* my story. Women are supposed to be compassionate; and I have heard so much of your goodness. You don't mind listening to me for a few minutes, do you?"

Georgie hesitated. No, this was no tipsy farmer. The man's earnestness at once interested and alarmed her.

"I never meant to come to Clevedon to-day. I almost wish, for your sake, I hadn't come. It was my fate, I suppose, that sent me here, or those devilish joy-bells clanging all the morning that drove me. Anyhow I came; came to find the man I have been looking for, on and off, since my daughter died."

He stood with his hand resting on a carved oaken reading-desk, looking down at Lady Clevedon, who had seated herself a little way off, thinking it wisest to seem calm and self-possessed. What if the man were some maniac who had stolen in among the guests? There was much in his manner to suggest such a fear—no hint of violence, but rather an unnatural calmness, which was still more appalling.

"Looking for him, on and off," he repeated, "since my daughter died. You have heard of me perhaps, Lady Clevedon; my name is Richard Redmayne."

"Yes, I have heard of you."

"And you have heard my story, I suppose."

"I have been told you had a daughter whom you lost, and whose death affected you severely."

"What, was that all? Did you hear no speculations as to the cause of her death; no hints of a seduction; a foolish trusting girl tempted away from her home?"

"No," Georgie answered gently; "I have heard nothing but the mere fact of your daughter's early death. But if the story is indeed so sad a one as you seem to say, I am sincerely sorry for you."

She thought that the man had been drinking, until the recollection of his wrongs and sorrows had in some measure affected his brain. She was very patient with him therefore, willing even to listen sympathisingly to any statement of his wrongs, whereby he might relieve an overburdened breast.

"Who said my daughter was disgraced?" he exclaimed, taking

up her words with an indignant air. "Not I. God would not suffer that. She was too pure to be the victim of a scoundrel. Death came between her and her tempter. But her death be upon his head!"

"I can't quite understand the story," faltered Georgie; "but I am sorry for you with all my heart."

"Be sorry for yourself, Lady Clevedon; for you are the wife of a villain."

O, the man was mad evidently, a wretched creature whom grief had made distraught. Her first thought had been right. She glanced towards the door with a little look of terror, and rose from her chair, her first impulse being to fly. Richard Redmayne laid his hand upon her arm.

"Stop," he said, "I want you to answer a question. What do you think of a man who came to my house under a false name, came to a neighbourhood where he should have come as master and landowner; came on the sly, pretending to be a stranger; came into an honest man's house and blighted the life of his child; tempted her away from home, under a lying promise of marriage—I have my dead girl's letter to prove that—and never meant to marry her; took her to a house that he had taken under another false name; and when she died in his arms—struck dead by the discovery of his falsehood, as I know she was—within a quarter of an hour of her entrance under that roof, lied again, and swore she was his sister; then buried her in a nameless grave, far away from her home, and left her doting father to find out, how best he might, what had become of his only child? What do you think of such a man as that, Lady Clevedon?"

"What can I think," said Georgie, who had grown very pale, "except that he was a villain?"

"A most consummate villain, eh?"

"A most consummate villain."

"I am glad you are honest enough to admit that," said Richard Redmayne, flinging Grace's locket upon the table, with the false back open, and the portrait exposed, "although the man is your husband."

"What do you mean, sir?" cried Georgie. "You must be mad to say such a thing."

"Look at that," he said, pointing to the miniature; "whose face is that, do you think?"

Alas for the fidelity of portraiture! The photograph of Hubert Walgrave Harcross, improved and beautified by the miniature painter, every mark of care and thought and age eliminated much more nearly resembled the elegant baronet than the studious lawyer. Georgie's heart began to beat wildly, and his

hand shook so much, that she could scarcely lift that fatal trinket. She did take it up, however, and looked at it, with a long despairing gaze.

"This is my husband's portrait, certainly," she said, in slow tremulous tones; "but what does that prove? Do you suppose that *anything* you can say would make me think ill of *him*?"

"O, I daresay you will stand by him, whatever he may be," cried Mr. Redmayne, with a sardonic laugh. "Besides, it all happened before he married you, and I suppose with a woman that doesn't count. I've heard that some women even like a man better for having been a scoundrel. No, I don't suppose you will think the worse of him for having broken my Grace's heart."

"How dare you talk to me like that? If I thought—if I could for a moment believe that he had ever done so base a thing, ever been so false and cruel! But I am foolish and wicked to tremble like this. As if *he* ever could have done anything base, as if he could have been a coward and a deceiver! How dare you come here to try and frighten me with this senseless accusation?"

"You have your husband's picture in your hand—the locket he sent my daughter."

"Do you think I will believe that?" cried Georgie, with a desperate courage, ready to defy this man—nay, Fate itself—rather than acknowledge that her idol could err. "How can I tell by what means you came by this locket? You may have found it somewhere, and invented this hateful story."

"It was a love-gift to my daughter; there are plenty who know that. There is a secret spring, you see—the portrait is not meant for common eyes—quite a lover's trick. And this man was false and secret in all he did."

"The picture proves nothing," Georgie said, with recovered firmness, "and your accusation is as ridiculous as it is offensive. My husband only came to England last year; until that time he had lived entirely abroad."

"Were you with him all the time, that you can answer for him so boldly? People come backwards and forwards sometimes, even without telling all their friends about it. I have been to Brisbane and back twice within the last seven years. That man came to Brierwood under a false name, and amused himself looking about his own estate, I suppose, on the sly; and when he got tired of that, amused himself with breaking my daughter's heart. He came recommended by John Wort, the steward: and when I wanted to hunt him down, John Wort stood between him and my vengeance. Fate sent me here to-day, or I might never have known the name of my daughter's murderer."

"I will not believe it," repeated Georgie, but this time in a helpless hopeless tone, that was very pitiful. O God! the case seemed made out so fully, and that miniature in her hand was so strong a corroboration of the miserable story. What motive could this man have for torturing her with a fabrication? Were the accusation ever so false—and false it must be—the accuser spoke in good faith.

She put her hands before her face, trying to be calm, to quiet the fast-growing confusion of her brain.

"There is some mistake," she said at last. "I am very sorry for you; but, believe me, you are completely wrong in your suspicion of my husband. If I do not know every detail of his past life—and I think I do, for he has told me so much about himself—I know, at least, that he is good and honourable, utterly incapable of a base or cowardly action. I should be most unworthy of his love and trust, if I could think ill of him. I cannot tell how this mistake may have arisen, or how you came by that locket; but I can say—yes, with the utmost confidence—that my husband is guiltless of any wrong against you or your daughter."

She raised her head proudly, looking Francis Clevedon's slanderer full in the face. Even if he were guilty, it was her duty to defend him; but she could not think him guilty. Circumstances might lie, but not Francis Clevedon.

Richard Redmayne surveyed her with a half-contemptuous pity.

"Of course you'll stand by him," he said; "stand me out that he wasn't there, that the portrait you've got in your hand is somebody else's portrait. Women are always ready to do that sort of thing. I'm very sorry for you, Lady Clevedon; but I mean to have some kind of reckoning with this truthful and honourable husband of yours. I mean to let the world hereabouts know what kind of a gentleman Sir Francis Clevedon is. Where can I find him?"

"You are not going to talk about this wretched business before everybody—to make a scene?" cried Georgie, with a woman's natural horror of open scandal.

"I mean to have it out with Sir Francis whenever and wherever I see him. Give me back that locket, if you please."

He took it from Georgie's hand and tied it to his watch-ribbon.

"You cannot see Sir Francis this evening, it is quite impossible."

"I'll find that out for myself," he said, passing her and going out of the room.

Georgie followed him into the hall, where he paused, looking about him with a puzzled air. A couple of men-servants were lounging by the open door, and Georgie felt herself safe. If

necessary she would order them to turn this man out of the house. She would do it rather than see her husband assailed in the midst of his friends. Who could tell what mischief such an accusation might do him in the estimation of his little world, however baseless the charge might be? Mr. Redmayne went up to one of the servants, and asked whether Sir Francis was still in the house.

"No, sir; my master went back to the grounds just now with General Cheviot," answered the man, looking at Richard Redmayne's pale face and loosened neckerchief with some astonishment. He was not one of the house visitors, and had clearly no business in that place; yet he looked too respectable a person to have any sinister motive for his intrusion—a gentleman who had been overcome by bitter beer or champagne, perhaps, and had wandered this way in mere purposeless meandering.

"How long is it since he went out?" asked Richard, impatiently. "What do you mean by 'just now'?"

"Ten minutes, if you want to be so uncommon exact about it," replied the retainer, with an offended air. "And, I say, if you're one of the tenants, this ain't the place as you're invited to. There's the tenants' marquee; that's your place."

Rick Redmayne passed him without deigning to notice this reproof. If Francis Clevedon had gone back to the grounds, it was his business to follow him. It mattered little where they met, so long as they met speedily.

Georgie had remained by the library door, almost hidden by the deep embrasure. She came out into the hall when Richard Redmayne was gone.

"Send some one to look for your master immediately," she said to one of the men, "or go yourself, if that will save time, and tell him I want to speak to him at once, in my own room."

"Yes, my lady; perhaps I had better go myself."

"Yes, yes, I think you had. And be sure you tell Sir Francis I wish to speak to him at once."

She stood in the porch for a little while, watching the footman as he crossed the lawn, making his way in and out among the company with tolerable celerity. She watched him till he was out of sight, and then went slowly up the broad oak staircase to the room with the oriel window, and flung herself on her knees before her pet arm-chair, and buried her head in the silken pillows, and sobbed as if her heart were broken. Yet she told herself over and over again that, come what might, she would never believe him guilty. But what if, when she told him Richard Redmayne's accusation, as she meant to tell it, word for word—what if he should admit the justice of the charge, strike her dumb by the confession of his infamy? He infamous, he a traitor, he who had so often told her that his past life did not

hold act or thought that he cared to keep secret from her! He stand before her unabashed, in the character of a cold-blooded seducer! The thing was not possible. And then she remembered the face that had smiled at her in the locket—his face and no other. No thought of Hubert Harcross, and that notorious likeness between the two men, ever flashed across her brain. Her mind was too full of that one image. Love narrows the universe to a circle hardly wider than a wedding-ring. She could not look beyond the husband of her choice and the shadow that had come between them.

She rose from her knees at last, after vainly endeavouring to pray, and went to the open window, keeping herself hidden behind the silken curtain, and looking out across the idle crowds, with that brazen dance music sounding in her ears—the slender thread of the last street song spun out to attenuation in the last popular waltz.

He would deny, he would explain, she told herself again and again, angry with her own weak spirit for wavering ever so little, yet not able altogether to overcome a sickening sense of fear. If he would only come and hear her strange story, and set everything right with a few words!

"He has but to look me in the face, and tell me how deeply I have wronged him, and my heart will be at rest," she said to herself, straining her eyes in their search for that one familiar figure.

She could not see him, and he did not come to her. She would have gone in quest of him herself, but that would have been to run the risk of missing him altogether, should he have received her message, and be on his way to her room. In that large house, and in those crowded grounds, it was so easy to miss any one. No, it was wiser to wait; and she waited, looking at the villagers dancing in the sunset, at the lights beginning to shine out one by one among the trees, as the evening shadows deepened, looking at them without seeing them.

CHAPTER XL.

"AND THERE NEVER WAS MOONLIGHT SO SWEET AS THIS."

WESTON VALLORY, being freed from his duties by the breaking-up of the party in the red-flagged tent a considerable time before Lady Clevedon's encounter with Mr. Redmayne, lost no time in seeking his rustic flame, whom he discovered with some trouble seated a little way apart from the revellers, amidst a cluster of pine trees, with Hubert Harcross stretched at her feet.

"I want to know why you used me so cruelly, Miss Bond,"

he said, with an air of being profoundly afflicted by her desertion. "I thought you had promised to sit next me at dinner."

"Did I?" giggled the coquettish Jane, bridling and simpering after her kind. "I'm sure I didn't remember anything about it. But you do bother so, there's no knowing what one says."

"Upon my soul, I consider your conduct most heartless," drawled Weston—"leaving me to the tender mercies of a stout lady in the laundress interest, and her still stouter sister-in-law, who mangles. It was like sitting between two animated feather-beds, with the thermometer at ninety-two—a sort of impromptu Turkish bath, without any douches. The people are dancing out there, in a blaze of sunshine—capital exercise for reducing one's weight, I should think. Will you do anything that way?"

"No, thank you; I'm engaged for the Lancers, and I don't think I shall dance anything else."

"What, not come unto these yellow sands, and there take hands, and so on? No down the middle, and set to partners, and that kind of thing?"

"No, thank you," murmured Miss Bond languidly, fanning herself with her pocket-handkerchief; "it's too 'ot for dancing."

She glanced archly at Mr. Harcross, who had lifted himself into a sitting position, and was surveying Weston lazily between his half-closed eyelids.

"I see, you're better engaged," said Mr. Vallory, turning on his heel.

It was a paltry triumph; but Mr. Harcross felt a malicious gratification in "taking it out" of Weston, even in so small a matter as this. There are people who seem to occupy the same rank in creation as black-beetles—the only possible pleasure we can have in relation to them is in treading upon them.

After this, he was bound to devote himself to Jane Bond, nowever wearisome her society might be to him. They strolled away from the crowd and that wearying sound of popular dance music, walked into the wilder part of the park, and Mr. Harcross tried to abandon himself entirely to the amusement of the moment. He tried to interest himself in the analysis of this vain shallow nature; made the girl tell him all about herself—her engagement to Joseph Flood, her flirtation with Weston Vallory, and those foolish dreams of some high fortune awaiting her in the future, which that insidious flatterer had awakened in her mind. He gave the girl a little good advice upon this; warned her to beware of such flatterers as Weston Vallory, whose homage was very worthless compared to the honest attachment of Mr. Flood.

"As for the good fortune which *may* befall a pretty girl like you, if the right man happens to come across her pathway, that

must always remain an unknown quantity," he said gravely; "but I believe that, for one pretty girl who marries above her station, there are a hundred pretty girls who live and die happily enough—perhaps quite as happily as the hundred-and-oneth—in their own sphere. I wouldn't break Mr. Flood's heart, if I were you, for the sake of a hypothetical offer, or what the lawyers call a contingent remainder."

"I'm sure I like Joseph well enough," the girl answered, shrugging her shoulders, and not at all gratified by the practical turn which the conversation had taken. "I know he's very fond of me, and has stood more from me than most men would stand from any girl. He'd been following me over a year before I ever said a civil word to him—following me as faithful as a dog; but he's so common! And if I marry him, I shall have to work hard all my life."

"My dear Miss Bond, if you married a duke, you'd have to work a great deal harder."

"What, do duchesses work?"

"Like galley-slaves. And you'd have to work harder than a duchess to the manner born; for first, you'd have to learn how to play your part—the stage business, as actors say—and then to play it. Upon my word, if you wish to take life easily, I wouldn't recommend you to aspire to the peerage. An honest husband, a tidy cottage, a clean hearth, and a little garden, with roses and honeysuckle climbing about one's windows—good heavens! I can imagine no existence more perfect than a cottage shared with the being one loves. Unhappily, it is only when we begin to descend the slope of the hill that we discover what the perfection of human life means."

He was thinking of the cottage at Highgate which he had meant to make so bright a bower, and of the bird that had flown heavenward from that fatal nest. "If I'd only known!" That was the perpetual refrain of his lament, the threnody which his soul was continually singing. Miss Bond found this somewhat serious conversation less entertaining than Weston's soft nothings; but there was a satisfaction in the idea of taking a solitary stroll with one of the gentlemen stewards instead of dancing with the common herd, who made themselves so obnoxiously red and warm and breath'ess with their exertions, and, as it were, a spectacle for the eyes of non-dancing mankind; like wine-flushed helots gyrating for the warning and instruction of Spartan youth.

Perhaps the best part of the whole business, to Miss Bond's mind, the circumstance that gave zest and flavour to this quiet saunter, was the idea that Joseph Flood, lashed into fury by the pangs of jealousy, was following her at a little distance, under cover of the wood, meditating vengeance upon her and her com-

panion, and gnashing his teeth in impotent rage. The damsel had something of the angler's instinct, and it was nothing to have hooked her fish unless she could have the pleasure of playing him a little, to his ineffable torture.

"I shall have a nice scene with Joseph to-morrow, I dessay," she said to Mr. Harcross.

"What, will he be jealous—even of me?"

"Lord bless your heart, I should think he would. He can't abide for me to speak to any one. I think he'd like to have me under lock and key in Maidstone jail rather than that I should enjoy myself a bit, making free with a stranger."

Weston Vallory walked away from the grassy circle on which the dancers were disporting themselves, smarting under Miss Bond's rebuff, and vindictively disposed towards Mr. Harcross as the primary cause of his humiliation. It was a very small thing, of course, this repulse from a pert village beauty. Mr. Vallory admired the damsel, but it is not to be supposed he cared for her; and yet he felt the affront as keenly as if he had been stung by a woman he adored. He was a man who felt small injuries; indeed his whole existence was made up of petty things. He had never cherished a wide aspiration in the whole course of his career. His value as a business man had chiefly consisted in his appreciation of detail, his rapid perception of minutiae. He was a man who deeply resented trifling affronts; and an affront from Hubert Harcross was thrice as bitter to him as an affront from any one else. That unforgiven wrong concerning Augusta rankled and festered. It seemed as if this man was always blocking his pathway; and after having spoiled the entire scheme of his life, must needs oust him even in so trivial a matter as a flirtation with a pretty peasant girl.

After this vexation he was in no humour for any farther exertions for the amusement of the populace. He had been immeasurably weary of the banquet in the tent, the stifling heat, and noise and riot. Had he not been bound to perform the duties imposed on him by Lady Clevedon in an agreeable manner, so as to secure his future consideration in a very pleasant house, he would have seen this vulgar herd sunk in the nethermost shades of Orcus sooner than he would have endured so much of their company; but of course he must fall in with the humour of the *châtelaine* if he wished to secure a hearty welcome at Clevedon in seasons to come; and as the house was agreeable, the *cuisine* irreproachable, his bedchamber spacious and facing the south-east, he did not object to take some trouble to please his hostess. The thing was done, however; and he washed his hands of these bucolic swains and their apple-cheeked sweethearts. He left them to tread their measures without him.

and strolled away towards the sunny old garden, where Lady Clevedon was accustomed to hold her kettledrum.

There was no kettledrum in the garden this afternoon. Times and seasons were out of joint; those formal meals which mark the passing hours upon the social dial were exploded, or topsyturvified. It was now five o'clock, and the luncheon in the great dining-hall was only just over; servants were dispensing coffee on the terrace, where the aristocratic guests had gathered to watch the dancing, and some of them to do a little flirtation on their own account. Mr. Vallory had no more inclination to join this privileged class than to caper with panting nymphs and shepherds on the sunlit grass. In plain English, Mr. Vallory was out of temper, and wanted to calm himself down with a quiet cigar. He was very glad to find the garden deserted, the roses and carnations wasting their spicery on the empty summer air. He smoked a couple of cigars, strolling up and down the broad gravel walk leading to Lady Clevedon's favourite summer-house; and when he grew tired of this recreation, seated himself comfortably in the summer-house, with his back against the wall and his legs stretched luxuriously upon a rustic chair. He sat thus, basking in the afternoon sunshine and meditating his injuries.

"Let me only get up a good case; put this little story of Miss Brierwood—no, Redmayne—and the lodger into a practicable form, and I shall lose no farther time in letting my cousin Augusta know what kind of a husband she secured for herself when she jilted me. I wonder how she would take it if I unearthed Miss Redmayne for her, and convinced her that my friend Harcross is a scoundrel. I daresay she'd make a good deal of fuss about it, and threaten no end of legal separations, and in the end forgive him: women generally do; and yet she's a little out of the common line. I hardly think she'd stomach any carrying-on of that kind. No; I think if I once opened her eyes upon the subject, my friend Harcross would have a bad time of it."

The sunshine, which glared full upon the summer-house at this time, began to grow troublesome, so Mr. Vallory left that retreat and sauntered towards the house. The cockatoo was screaming on his perch, and he went across the grass to it, and amused himself a little at the creature's expense; then growing speedily weary of its indignant gobblings and snappings, he looked into the library, and seeing no one in the spacious cool-looking chamber, went in, and planted himself comfortably in an easy-chair by one of the windows, shut in completely from the rest of the room by one of those seven-foot-high bookcases which jutted out from the wall. In this sheltered nook he found *Punch*, and a new magazine or two, just sufficient literatur

wherewith to read himself to sleep. He opened one of the magazines, turned over the leaves listlessly, read half a page or so, and anon slumbered, letting the book glide gently from his relaxing hand. This happened about an hour before Richard Redmayne confronted Lady Clevedon in that room.

Nothing could be more placid than Weston Vallory's repose. The burden of his annoyances slipped away from him in the sensual delight of that perfect rest in a supremely comfortable chair, in a cool quiet room, with the balmy breath of summer stealing gently across his face as he slept. For a long time his sleep was dreamless, his brain empty of every impression; then came a semi-consciousness of something, he knew not what, going on near him, a vague idea that he ought to be awake and up, and that he must break loose from that delicious bondage of drowsiness; and then, growing gradually louder, clearer, sharper, the sound of a man's passionate voice.

He pulled himself up suddenly at last, and sat with open eyes and ears listening to a speaker who was only divided from him by that screen of books. His chair was placed in the extreme angle formed by the bookcase and the wall, so that he was entirely hidden from any one in the centre of the room.

He awoke in time to hear the speaker say, "You have heard of me perhaps, Lady Clevedon; my name is Richard Redmayne."

He heard this, and all that followed this, and was quick to perceive that the farmer had taken Sir Francis Clevedon for Hubert Harcross.

"A strange turn for events to take," he said to himself; "and I should imagine very likely to lead up to a crisis. Now I know what kind of man this Redmayne is, I shall be able to tackle him. A passionate fellow, it seems; a fellow who would stick at nothing, I should think, when his blood is up."

He smiled—a slow meditative smile.

"Upon my word, I don't believe Mr. Harcross has heard the last of this Redmayne's daughter," he thought, as he rose from his seat in the corner and peered cautiously into the room. It was quite empty; but Mr. Vallory preferred to make his retreat by the garden, whence he departed in quest of Richard Redmayne.

"I'll take the trouble to enlighten him as to the traitor's identity," he said to himself. "Francis Clevedon is a good fellow, and it's too bad that he should carry the burden of another man's sin upon his shoulders."

He spent some time looking for Mr. Redmayne among the crowd, but failed to find him, and was ultimately pounced upon by Colonel Davenant and told-off upon some new duty of his stewardship, to his extreme aggravation.

When the shadows thickened in the wood Mr. Harcross and

his companion went back to the lawn, where the talk and the laughter and the music had grown louder. The local band had now emerged from retirement, and were braying furiously, refreshed with strong drink, and more bold than careful in their instrumentation. Mr. Harcross and Jane Bond danced the Lancers in the twilight, while the lamps were being lighted in the wood, to the edification of Joseph Flood, who sat on a bench a little way off, biting his nails and watching them; and after the Lancers were over, Mr. Harcross gave Miss Bond a lesson in waltzing, the damsel having grown somewhat reckless by this time, and not caring whether her father did or did not see her indulging in this forbidden exercise. Mrs. Harcross, who was sauntering to and fro with a Kentish magnate, distinguished her husband's figure among the dancers. She was a little surprised that he should push the duty of his stewardship so far, but had no jealousy of rustic beauties, only a languid disapproval of so unnecessary a condescension. She might have approved had he been canvassing the county, and these people his constituents. And so the day waned, the coloured lamps shone out of the dusky branches of the trees and twinkled round the margins of the fountains. Youthful minds began to languish for the fireworks; more world-weary spirits had a too frequent recourse to the tents where refreshments were liberally dispensed. The Colonel began to grow a little uneasy in his mind as the crowd grew merrier. He had organised everything to perfection except the dispersal of his guests.

"But they'll all go directly after the fireworks, of course," he said to Mr. Wort, who stood beside him at the entrance to the chief tent.

The steward groaned aloud.

"Go," he said; "yes, if I can find barrers enough to wheel 'em all away upon. That's about the only chance there is of their going, I take it."

Joseph Flood had consumed his share of the strong ale dealt out to the thirsty dancers, had tried to drown the green-eyed monster in cool draughts of wholesome malt liquor; but the more he drowned that demon the stronger it grew, until the groom's brain was on fire, and his mind distracted with darker thoughts than had ever entered it before.

That first lesson in the divine art of waltzing, under the harvest moon, whose calm yellow splendour rose high above those lesser earthly lights of green and red and blue and silver twinkling among the dark foliage, that novel sensation of revolving gently to the sound of music with a strong arm clasping and sustaining her, was highly agreeable to Jane Bond; all the more agreeable on account of her conviction that her plighted lover was watching her from some coign of vantage in the background.

Yes, this was something like dancing. How different from those jiggling, jostling, jolting Sir Roger de Coverleys, which she had been taught to regard as the chiefest delight of Terpsichore! This was to live a new life, to feel her heart beating with a new motion.

Mr. Harcross danced well, although of late years he had taken to dance rarely. There had been a day when it was of some importance to him to be among the best waltzers in a ball-room. He had drunk more than he was accustomed to drink in the course of this festival day, and the influence of that unwonted indulgence made his waltzing somewhat wilder than the ordinary ball-room business. He told the bandmaster to play faster, and spun Miss Bond round the grassy circle, amidst a few breathless ladies'-maids with their labouring swains, in a waltz as furious as some unholy midnight dance of fiends and witches on the Blocksberg. The ladies'-maids and their exhausted partners broke down under the pace, and one couple after another dropped into the background, until Hubert Harcross and Jane Bond were spinning round alone in the summer moonlight.

The spectators applauded as the music ended with a sharp volley of chords, more or less together, and this last couple walked slowly away, side by side. Mr. Harcross, in sporting phraseology, had not turned a hair; but his partner was flushed and panting, and had somewhat of a Mænadie aspect in her streaming dress and loosened hair.

"I had no idea that waltzing was so beautiful," said Jane breathlessly.

"I had no idea that you were so beautiful till I saw you under the moonlight," retorted her partner, contemplating the handsome face and dishevelled hair, the florid beauty chastened by that mellow light, with a purely artistic admiration. "You have a natural genius for waltzing; but you must have had some practice surely before to-night?"

"I have waltzed by myself sometimes in the garden, when I knew father was safe out of the way, and hummed the music all the time; but it makes one's breath go dreadful."

"You have waltzed by yourself in the garden?" said Mr. Harcross in a pitying tone. "Poor little girl!"

This did really seem to him a pitiful picture—these yearnings for the pleasures of a bright unknown world, never to be gratified.

"What a pity there should be pretty girls in this walk of life!" he said to himself. "Strange that a wise dispensation did not provide for their all being plain."

He fetched a deep glass of lemonade for Miss Bond from one of the tents, and having provided her with this refreshment, stood by her irresolute wondering what excuse he could make

for leaving her to her own devices. He was somewhat weary of his stewardship, had toiled hard since noon, and would have been exceeding glad to slip away and smoke a quiet cigar in one of the dim old stone colonnades, which were not lighted with coloured lamps.

Miss Bond, however, having secured to herself an accomplished cavalier, was in nowise minded to let him depart until the fête was finished. At midnight the fairy dream would be ended, and she must be Cinderella again, without any hope of future queenhood to result from a lost slipper; but in the meanwhile, since she had the prince for her cavalier, she did not intend to let him go lightly. Nor did she much relish the idea of encountering the outraged Joseph unprotected. There was an agreeable excitement in provoking his wrath, but the wrath itself was a thing to be avoided. She did not want to meet him until his jealousy had cooled a little, until he was in a state of mind to be soothed and wheedled into good-humour. Of her father she had no present fear, as a friendly dairymaid had informed her that he was safely bestowed with a little knot of gossips on a bench by the bowling-green, smoking and talking politics in a sober way, as became a pious nonconformist.

"You'll stop and show me the fireworks, won't you?" she asked Mr. Harcross, as if aware that he was meditating his escape.

"Do you think the catherine-wheels and the roman candles will be any better if I am by to expound them?" he asked, smiling, a little flattered even by this peasant girl's desire for his company, and yet yearning for a peaceful cigar.

"I'm sure I shall like them better," replied Miss Bond. "Do stay."

"Of course I will stay if you really wish it. And in that case, we may as well take a stroll in the moonlight. The fireworks will not begin for an hour. It is only just nine; and see how lovely the park looks over there, beyond those garish red and blue lamps, which remind me of my boyhood's paradise, Vauxhall."

Miss Bond would have infinitely preferred to circulate among the crowd, with Mr. Harcross at her side, leaning on his arm perhaps, if he would only be polite enough to offer her that support, which he had not done since they finished their waltz. It was of very little use to have secured an aristocratic admirer, if she could not exhibit him before the envious eyes of her friends, the dairymaids and laundrymaids of Clevedon. She was not at all sentimentally inclined, and she could see the moonlit avenues of the park any night in the year from January to December, when there was a moon. But these many-coloured lamps twinkling among the branches, or festooned from bough

to bough, she could not see. It seemed a foolish thing to turn one's back upon them for the contemplation of moonbeams and shadows.

She assented to Mr. Harcross's proposition graciously enough, notwithstanding, for she had perceived his desire to leave her, and was proud of having retained him by her side. They walked slowly along the grassy avenue, leaving all the glare and noise of the festival behind them, with nothing before them but the utter peacefulness and perfect beauty of the moonlit landscape.

Mr. Harcross was very silent. He had had quite enough of the toils of stewardship, and his thoughts had gone back to that one sad sweet memory which could not be banished in this scene. So sweet, so bitter, so sad was the remembrance, that it was an actual pain to think of it; and yet his fancies returned from every wandering track to hover round this one spot of memory. Even the girl by his side to-night, so common a piece of clay, so wearisome a companion, by very force of contrast reminded him of that other one whose company had never been tedious, whose innocent lips had never shaped a sordid thought.

"I must get back to London at once, and start for Norway or some uncivilised place, where I shall be in danger of my life, and shall have no time for brooding," he said to himself. "I must make an end of this holiday-making somehow. It is murderous work. I think a week more of this neighbourhood and these memories would be the death of me. I must invent some excuse for leaving to-morrow, whether Augusta likes it or not; and since she has chosen to make herself the supreme consideration, she must not be surprised if I too consult my own inclinations. She can stay here, and satisfy society. But I go to-morrow, come what may."

CHAPTER XLI

"DO EVIL DEEDS THUS QUICKLY COME TO END!"

AFTER that interview with Lady Clevedon in the library, Richard Redmayne went in search of Sir Francis, but did not succeed in discovering him among the crowd. The twilight deepened into night, and he was still looking for his enemy in a desultory way, pausing to refresh himself with strong drink in one of the tents, speaking to no one, and receiving very slight notice from the busy pleasure-seekers, who were all intent on their own enjoy-

ment. He was quite alone in that joyous crowd; he drank his liquor in moody silence, and departed as he came, to renew the search for that man whom he so desired to meet face to face.

When he came out of the tent, the lamps were all twinkling in the dusky boughs, the crowd at its gayest, the music at its loudest. The dazzle and confusion of the scene troubled his overcharged brain. He stood for some time looking about him with a perplexed air. He had lived by himself ever since he came to England, and had come straight from those remote colonial pastures where the stranger's foot rarely trod. It was a new thing to find himself amidst a herd of men and women, talking, laughing, dancing, by the light of a thousand coloured lamps, to the sound of joyous music. He looked at the scene for some little time, half stupefied by its unfamiliar brightness, then turned suddenly away from all this riot, and plunged into the cool depths of the park, where the fern grew up to his knees.

He walked some distance, neither looking nor caring where he went, and only stopped when he stumbled across a prostrate figure lying at his very feet.

A poacher perhaps; yet it was scarcely a night to be selected by any marauder with felonious intentions towards the game. The full moon and the festival together were strong reasons against the wiring of hares or the illegal slaughter of pheasants.

Mr. Redmayne stooped down to examine the individual who had become an obstacle in his path. It was a man lying face downwards among the fern, with his hat off, and his forehead resting on his folded arms.

"What's up, my lad?" said Richard Redmayne, somewhat alarmed by his attitude. "Is there anything amiss?"

"Yes, there is," answered the man, raising himself from the fern with a sullen air, and then stooping to pick up a gun which had lain beside him. "Yes, there is something amiss; but nothing you can mend, unless you know any cure for a woman's vanity and fickleness."

The speaker was Joseph Flood, the groom.

"What are you doing with that gun?" Mr. Redmayne demanded sternly.

"What's that to you?"

"You've been after the birds."

"No, I haven't."

"Then what can you want with a gun?"

"O, I don't know. It might come handy, if I wanted to use it."

"Is it loaded?"

"Yes, with swan-shot. Let it alone, can't you?"

"You've no business prowling about here with a loaded gun."

"Haven't I? Have you any business prowling about here without a gun? I'm a servant up at the house yonder—Sir Francis Clevedon's own groom—and I've a right to be here if I please."

"Not with that gun."

"How do you know that? It's my own gun. Perhaps I wanted a pop at the wild-fowl down by the water yonder. There's some snipe, I've heard say."

"You don't want swan-shot for snipe."

"I'm not particular. Suppose I wanted to wing one of the cygnets, to get a feather for my sweetheart's hat, you'd have no objection, I suppose, though you are so anxious about what don't anyways concern you?"

Richard Redmayne looked at the young man doubtfully. There was something queer about his manner; but that might mean very little. He had been drinking most likely, and his predatory instincts had been stimulated by the drink. It mattered very little what he meant or did not mean, Richard Redmayne thought; so he let him go without farther questioning, but was curious enough to watch where he went, and to follow him at a little distance.

The groom went in and out among the trees by a circuitous track, till he came to a classic temple on a little knoll, a somewhat delapidated edifice, faced with stucco, which had peeled off in patches, leaving the brickwork bare. The charitable ivy, which covers and beautifies decay, had crept about the Doric pillars; the spider had woven his web from column to column; the swallow had made his nest under the cornice. It was one of the fancies upon which Sir Lucas had wasted his substance, and Sir Francis intended to restore or demolish it as soon as his leisure and his purse permitted. In the meantime, it was sufficiently picturesque under the moonlight.

Here Mr. Flood deposited his gun, in a convenient hiding-place, under a stone bench which had been provided for the repose of the wanderer—a bench on which lovers might sit hand in hand as one who sees them in ancient engravings—Lavinia in a scanty petticoat, Eugenius in a tie-wig. Richard Redmayne saw him put away the gun, and then depart by the opposite way, whistling as he went, but not merrily. When he had watched the young man out of sight, Mr. Redmayne mounted the little knoll, and seated himself on the steps of the temple.

He had his cutty-pipe in his pocket, so he was able to solace himself, or, at any rate, to tranquillise himself, with the aid of that comforter. He sat smoking in the soft summer moonlight, his figure half hidden by the shadow of the columns on each side of him and the cornice above his head. He sat and smoked, catching the blue rings of vapour wind slowly upwards in the

clear air, with his mind full of gloomy thoughts, yet with a grim sense of satisfaction nevertheless.

He had found his man. The long hunt, which had seemed so hopeless even to the professional hunter, had come to an end. He had found his man. It was only a question of an hour or so less or more when he should stand face to face with his daughter's destroyer. And then—what then? What was to come of their meeting? He would accuse him, denounce him, disgrace him in the estimation of every honest man and woman; mark him out for all time to come as a liar and a seducer; set against the name he was doubtless proud of as foul a dishonour as ever blotted the reputation of a gentleman! But would this satisfy his long-cherished hunger for revenge? Would this slake that bitter thirst which had tormented him for years? Would this exercise the demon of his dreams—give him peaceful slumbers in nights to come—a smooth pillow for his dying head? Would this set his angry heart at rest, and soothe his grief? A thousand times, no! Could words, empty words, avenge his daughter? Must he not have heavier payment than those?

What was it he had thought of far away, upon those distant hill-tops, amidst the sources of those wider rivers that flow from the Cordilleras to the sea—in that wild solitude where Nature's lonely grandeur seems to widen the soul of man—what had he thought of there, when he brooded on the day which should bring him face to face with his daughter's destroyer? Not of a vengeance made up of words, assuredly, mere empty breath, frothy threatenings that must end in nothing. What was the vow which he had vowed upon those empty hills, with a savage world around him and savage instincts stirring in his breast? He knew but too well what it was. It hardly needed the strong liquor he had drunk that day to rekindle that long-smouldering fire. The smothered embers had never grown cold; a breath was enough to fan them into white heat.

He had a brace of revolvers in his bedroom at Brierwood. He had bought them at Melbourne, after his second outward voyage, for self-defence, in the first instance, and with a legitimate motive enough, but not without a lurking thought of some distant day when he might find a deadly use for them. He had hung them up by his bedside, and had contemplated them meditatively many a time, in the pause that a better or a happier man might have given to his prayers; had turned on his pillow often in the cold gray dawn to look at them, with a grisly satisfaction.

He thought of his pistols now, as he sat on the moss-grown steps of the Doric temple deliberating his revenge. He would have given half his estate to have had one of those grim com-

panions lying snug in his coat-pocket. Yet how should he have thought of bringing such weapons to a rustic festival—to the birthday feast of the model squire? His thoughts went to the gun lying under the stone bench loaded with swan-shot.

"What did that fellow want with his gun out here to-night?" he wondered, but did not perplex himself long with that question. His universe was filled with his own great wrong. He had no concern to spare for another man's business, were it ever so desperate. He would hardly have stepped out of his own path to-night to prevent an assassination.

He filled his pipe a second time and smoked it out, and that purpose which had been cloudy and dim at first assumed a sharper outline.

Accuse him, denounce him, disgrace him? No. He would do what he swore to do on the day he discovered his daughter's fate—he would keep faith with himself, and with her shade. Of after consequences, of the price which he should have to pay society or his God, for this bitter-sweet revenge, he thought no more than he might have done had he been the darkest among pagans, and alone with his foe in an untrodden world where human justice was unknown. And having fully made up his mind upon this point, he sat and smoked his third pipe with a gloomy tranquillity, like a contented savage who has made tracks for his enemy's lair, and sits lurking in the shade of the gum-trees beside his wigwam, waiting till the unconscious victim shall come out and be tomahawked. Yet he had no suspicion that his victim was very near him, was destined to smooth his way to that dark deed which had now taken its full form and pressure in his mind. Of the when and where the thing was to be done he had no notion; he only knew that so soon as his opportunity came he would do it.

The harvest moon rose higher, the clear pure night air grew still clearer, and that magical light which has a deeper charm, a more thrilling beauty than any glory of sunshine, spread itself over the enchanted woodland: a landscape which by day would have been comparatively commonplace, like unto many other pictures which adorn the earth, became poetical in its calm beauty. Richard Redmayne thought of Bulrush Meads, and the moonlights he had seen there; thought of that fond dream which he had once dreamed, of his daughter Grace installed as the young queen of that fertile valley, of those far-spreading hills, fifteen hundred feet above the sea-level. It was all over, the dream. He should never see Bulrush Meads, the new home which he had beautified, any more, and the old home for which he had toiled and suffered had lost its glamour. Without Grace, Briewood was worse than a desert; without Grace, the Australian homestead was only a strange dwelling across the barren

sea. It seemed to him that he had lost his place and business on this earth, in losing her. He had lived only to satisfy his appetite for revenge; had been nourished and sustained by that very hunger, like that monster which makes the meat it feeds on.

He felt himself to-night something more than a man, with a man's passions and a man's weakness and uncertainty; felt like a being foredoomed to accomplish a certain end. If he had known anything of those old Greek stories, in which the men seem shadows moving to the music of the Fates, he might have fancied some likeness between himself and those awful figures, destiny-impelled, for ever trending blindly to one fore-ordained issue.

A distant clock chimed the half-hour after nine. That sound pierced the stillness of the wood, although the vulgar dance music and the noise of many voices did not penetrate these shadowy aisles. So early! He felt as if he had lived half a lifetime since Sir Francis Clevedon came into the tent.

His third pipe was half smoked out when he heard the faintest rustle of the fern in the distance; then saw the glimmer of a woman's dress, white under the moonbeams; then heard a woman's laugh, and a man's voice answering it; and then two figures coming towards him—a girl with a man walking by her side, bending down with an air as of a lover to speak to her.

He laid down his pipe and watched them—at first idly, then with a sharp sudden interest, afterwards with a savage intensity. He crouched lower upon the steps of the temple, his strong right arm stretched itself stealthily across the broken stone floor, his fingers groped under the bench amongst weeds and rubbish, and clutched the groom's gun. He drew it out, examined the lock and priming, and then carried it to his shoulder, and took a deliberate aim.

He had had plenty of exercise for his gun in Australia, when with empty heart and idle brain he tramped the woods and hills from sunrise to sunset, only anxious to get rid of his joyless day.

The girl and her companion came nearer,—the girl a mere peasant, he could see plainly enough; but the man a gentleman, whose face he fancied he knew as well as he knew his own. With what an air he bent to speak to her, and how the poor fool drank in his baleful flatteries! A man who lived only to play the seducer, thought Richard Redmayne. Was it not a righteous deed to rid the earth of such vermin? They came to within about twenty feet of the temple, neither of them looking to the right or the left. The man walked on that side of the grassy alley nearest the knoll, the girl on his right hand. When they were conveniently close to him, Richard Redmayne fired, covering the man's breast with his gun.

He dropped face downwards on the grass: the girl looked round her wildly for a moment, gave a shrill piercing scream, and fell on her knees at his side. Rick Redmayne flung the gun into a ferny hollow, and walked quietly away.

"I am glad I have done it," he said.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE WRONG MAN.

No one hindered Richard Redmayne's exit from Clevedon Park. His boyish experiences of nutting and squirrel-hunting had made him familiar with every hillock and hollow, with every clump of hawthorn or thicket of hazel. He knew of a ladder and stile on the south wall by which he could descend upon the Kingsbury road, a spot at which there was little chance of meeting any one even to-night.

He did not stop to consider this, however, even for a moment. There was nothing of the criminal's headlong flight in his swift departure. His business was accomplished, and he went away. That was all. How long or how brief might be the interval that must elapse before he should be called to account for this night's work, he cared very little. That he should be called to account, sooner or later, he considered inevitable. He was prepared to stand by what he had done, ay, even on the scaffold.

As to the fatal result of his deliberate fire, he had little doubt. His Australian life had made his hand too sure for any uncertainty upon this point. The marksman who had never failed to bring down the bird that seemed but a speck of shadow in the blue ether could hardly have missed the breast of a man at thirty paces. And he had seen his victim fall with the heavy leaden drop of a creature wounded to the death.

Was he sorry for what he had done? Did he regret that one swift instantaneous act by which he had separated himself for ever from the ranks of his fellow-men, and placed himself in the brotherhood of Cain? No, he was not sorry; but exultant rather, as having accomplished his earthly mission. He looked up at the stars and fancied his daughter in some unknown world beyond them, and could almost have lifted up his voice in the still night, to tell her that her wrongs were avenged.

The first of the sky-rockets shot up above the trees as he climbed the ladder. He stood for a few minutes on the highest

step, watching the swift ascending stars, the showers of falling light.

"They don't know anything yet," he thought, "or they wouldn't let off their fireworks."

He waited and watched for more light in the sky above Clevedon Park, but after those few rockets, which had followed one another in quick succession, there was nothing. The sky remained blank, or only peopled by those sublimer stars which are happily fixtures.

He dropped down into the empty road, and crossed over to a meadow path that would take him to the cross cut by which he had come to Clevedon in the morning. He did not hasten his steps with the air of a man who fancies himself hunted by mortal pursuers, nor did he rush onward blindly, as if the furies that wait on such deeds as his were already in pursuit of him. He took his time, and was perhaps cooler on this return journey than he had been when he came to Clevedon, or at any rate more resolute. He had done what he wanted to do, that was the grand point. The time might come when his mind would be awakened to the enormity of his crime; but in this present hour he felt no more compunction than if he had slain a beast of prey.

It was close upon eleven o'clock when he came to Brierwood, letting himself into the garden by the meadow path. What an awful stillness there was in the old house as he went in, and how the empty floors resounded under his tread! He thought of the night of his first return from Australia, when his heart had beat high with the fond expectation of finding his daughter's arms clasped round his neck, his daughter's fair young head nestling upon his breast. O miserable night, O bitter grief! Was the payment which he had taken just now one whit too heavy for the anguish of that unforgetten hour?

"Could I do less than kill him?" he said to himself with a conviction that there was justice in the deed. He did not light a candle in the kitchen, or settle himself in the sitting-room which he was accustomed to occupy, but went straight up to his bedroom and flung himself on his bed. That, under cover of this night which he was thus wasting, he might have got clear away from the scene of his crime, and secured his escape from its consequences, was a fact which never for a moment occupied his consideration. He would stand by the deed he had done. To have fled ignominiously, leaving some innocent person to suffer for his act, would be indeed to convert that which he had deemed a sacrifice into a murder. He waited calmly for the issue of the night's work. He thought as he lay down how that consummate scoundrel had once rested on this bed, had lain here plotting the ruin of the daughter of the house: and

LE thought, with a savage sense of satisfaction, of that couch on which he lay to-night, and how blank and dreary was *his* slumber.

"Surely such men must have bad dreams when they are dead," he said to himself.

Not very long did he lie awake to meditate upon his crime or his victim. He had drunk a good deal at Clevedon, had been longer on foot and in the open air than he had been accustomed to be of late. His meditations wandered off into a tangle of broken thoughts before his head had rested long upon his pillow, and when Kingsbury church-clock chimed the half-hour after eleven, he was sleeping as peacefully as a child.

What a strange thing it seemed to wake next morning, soon after daybreak, to look round him wonderingly for a few minutes, staring idly at the sunlit chamber, and then to recall, as it were in one flash, the events of the previous night! It came back to him—the scene in the wood—vivid as in the moment of its enactment; and still he was not sorry for what he had done. He felt some touch of sorrow for that gentle pretty-looking young wife, who had stood by her husband so bravely, and who must needs be the chief victim in this tragedy; but for the man he had slain he felt neither regret nor pity; for the position in which he had placed himself he suffered no compunction. If the business of last night must be atoned for on the scaffold, he was prepared to make the atonement, to die that shameful death for his daughter's sake.

It was only five o'clock when he went downstairs and out into the garden. The Bushes, exhausted by unaccustomed dissipation, still slumbered.

"I shall hear enough about last night's work when Mrs. Bush comes down, I daresay," he said to himself; and he walked about the garden smoking his pipe until that time should arrive, with no shade of alteration in his habitual aspect, neither paler nor redder, neither graver nor more excited, than he was wont to be.

He made the circuit of the garden several times, casting a look at the kitchen windows every now and then, expecting to see the industrious matron fling the lattices open, or to behold her emerge from the kitchen-door with her pail to fetch water for the morning's purifications. He had walked and smoked and meditated for nearly an hour and a half, however, before the lattices opened and Mrs. Bush's homely countenance appeared, picturesquely framed by the Virginian creeper that covered this end of the house.

You're rather late this morning, aren't you, Mrs. Bush?"

inquired Richard Redmayne, coming over the grass towards the open window.

"Late, Mr. Redmayne," exclaimed the matron, "well I may be late! I'm sure I wonder as I was able to get off my bed this morning, which my poor inside has not left off twittering ever since a quarter past ten o'clock last night; and I'm sure it was nothing as I eat or drank yesterday, for no one could have been more moderate; and Bush was as sober as a judge, and quite low-spirited like after dinner, and shed tears when Sir Francis Clevedon's health was drunk. No, Mr. Redmayne, it wasn't what we took as turned our insides; it was the awful turn as that poor dear gentleman's death gave us just as the fireworks were a-beginning to go off."

"What gentleman? What do you mean?"

"Lor, Mr. Redmayne, it can't be as you don't know what happened surely! My goodman saw you coming out of the tenants' markwee, and he come to me and says it did his heart good to see you'd made up your mind to enjoy yourself like the rest of the world, for once in a way."

"Yes, I took it into my head to go all of a sudden; but I felt lik a fish out of water, and came away soon after dinner."

"What? Then you don't know——" gasped Mrs. Bush, staring at him.

"I don't know what?"

"Anything about the poor gentleman that was killed in the park near the old stone summer-house as Sir Lucas built?"

"A gentleman killed!" said Richard Redmayne deliberately. "That was curious."

"Curious, Mr. Redmayne! Don't say curious; it was dreadful. He must have dropped down dead instantaneously, I heard say; and no one knows who did it—whether it was poachers or jealousy; for he had been talking to that bold young hussy Bond's daughter all the afternoon, and she's got a'most as many sweethearts as she has fingers and toes. And his poor wife they said sent down like a stone when they carried him up to the terrace, where she was standing with the rest of the company."

"Ah, poor soul," said Richard thoughtfully; "I'm sorry for her. Yes, I'm sorry for Lady Clevedon."

"Lady Clevedon!" echoed Mrs. Bush; "yes, it do come hard upon her too, of course. A ninquis, and a funeral, and all; and all her visitors about her; and Sir Francis's birthday too."

"His birthday; yes," said Mr. Redmayne, with a short laugh; "I don't suppose when he made such a fuss about his birthday he reckoned it was to be his last."

"Lor, Mr. Redmayne! how can you say so? Why should it be his last? I suppose you mean as it's the last time he'll be

likely to give us all such a treat, after its winding up with his friend's being murdered."

"His friend murdered! What do you mean? It was Sir Francis Clevedon who was shot last night."

"Sir Francis Clevedon! Lord a-mercy on us, Mr. Redmayne, what can have put such a horrid notion into your head? I'm sure I never said anything about Sir Francis. The Lord forbid!"

"Not Sir Francis? Why, you must be mad, woman! It was Sir Francis!"

"You must be losing your poor dear senses, Mr. Redmayne," said Mrs. Bush, in a soothing tone, being always inclined to believe that her employer had, in Australian parlance, "a shingle short." "I never said a syllable about Sir Francis. It was a friend of his that was killed—a gentleman from London—a Mr. Arsomething—I know his name begins with a haitch."

Richard Redmayne walked slowly away, speechless. Was he really mad to-day, or had he been mad last night, his senses distraught, his eyes beholding things that were not? So surely as he was a living man he had seen the face in the miniature turned towards him in the broad moonlight, the same face, line for line, hardly less distinctly seen than in the full glare of day.

Had he been the victim of some hideous delusion, had his brain been bemused by strong drink, when he fired that fatal gun, and had he slain an innocent man in his madness? Such a catastrophe seemed to him too horrible for possibility. Yet Francis Clevedon lived, Grace remained unavenged, and he was an assassin.

"I won't trust that woman's word," he said to himself, after a long pause; "it's more likely her brain's muddled this morning than that I didn't know what I was doing last night. I'll look into the business myself."

He lost no time in setting about this personal investigation, but walked off at once by the field path towards Clevedon. Yet before he had gone far he changed his mind, remembering that Kingsbury was much nearer, and that he might hear all he wanted to hear in that village.

He could see that the place was astir with some unusual excitement before he had crossed the common. There was a much larger group of idlers at the door of the Coach and Horses than the customary knot of gossips. A couple of chaise-carts were halting before the trough between the two tall elms opposite the inn; a man on horseback was standing before Mr. Wort's garden-gate. Richard Redmayne walked straight across to this gate, not caring for the indirect information to be gained from village gossips when he might interrogate the steward himself.

"Is Mr. Wort indoors?" he asked the man on horseback, who

had a semi-official air. Mr. Redmayne smiled grimly to himself as he thought that this man might belong to the constabulary, and be on the look-out for the assassin.

"I don't mind swinging for the man who killed my daughter," he thought; "but it would be hard lines to be hung for a blunder."

"Yes, Mr. Wort's in his office; but there's a gentleman with him, and he's busy," the man answered, without looking to the right or the left.

"I can't help that," said Mr. Redmayne; "I must see him."

He went into the little shed of an office, which he had not entered since that night of his first coming home when he had said hard things to the steward. He went in coolly enough, and found John Wort in close conference with a grave-looking middle-aged man, who had the bearing of a soldier in plain clothes, and who was the chief of the Tunbridge police-station.

"I can't speak to any one now," Mr. Wort said hurriedly; and then recognizing the new-comer with a start, "What, Redmayne, is it you? What the devil brings you here this morning?"

"I want to know what has happened at Clevedon. Everybody seems to have gone crazy. I can't get a straight answer anywhere."

"I should think everybody must know what has happened within twenty mile of Kingsbury; there's been talk enough. There was a brutal murder in Clevedon Park last night, Richard Redmayne; a man shot like a rabbit; that's what has happened."

"But who was the man?" cried Richard savagely; "that's what I want to know! Can't you give him his name?"

"His name was Harcross," Mr. Wort answered gravely. "And now I don't suppose you are much wiser than you were before, for he was a stranger down here."

"Harcross—Harcross!" Richard Redmayne repeated, with a stupefied look. "They told me it was Sir Francis Clevedon was shot last night."

"Then they must have been clean daft, whoever they were," exclaimed the steward impatiently; "and now perhaps you'll leave me alone with this gentleman; for we've got some business to settle between us."

Richard Redmayne walked out of the office without a word. It would profit him nothing to ask any further questions. He had slain the wrong man; that was horribly certain. He had burdened his soul with a useless crime; dyed his hands in the blood of a fellow-creature who had never injured him. He hardly knew where to go, or what to do with himself, after leaving John Wort's office. His whole life seemed a series of blunders. If he had taken his daughter to Australia with him, as she had so piteously entreated him to do, he might have had

her for his comfort and delight to-day: if he had never returned from his second voyage, he would have at least escaped this unnecessary crime. Now, for the first time, he felt himself a murderer. He took the high road to Clevedon, tramping along the dusty way in the morning sunshine, unconscious of fatigue. He wanted to know something more, he hardly knew what, only to be more and more certain of his own folly. To think that his senses had so befooled him! Sir Francis Clevedon lived and triumphed, laughed perhaps in his soul at the thought of this egregious blunder, and an innocent man lay dead, slain untimely by his wicked hand.

At the south lodge he found Joshua Bond, the gardener, two or three other out-of-door servants, and a knot of accidental idlers, discussing the catastrophe. Jane Bond was lying upstairs in her bedroom in a high fever, induced by the horror of the previous night.

"And may it be a chastening and a blessing to her," said the gardener, "a warning to repent, and turn from the paths of foolishness!"

"Do you suspect anybody of having a hand in it?" asked an elderly man, proprietor of the shop at Hubbleford.

"There was but one hand in it, Mr. Perkis," replied the gardener solemnly—"the hand that drew the trigger. I don't deny that I have my own thoughts upon the subject, Mr. Perkis; but I tell them to no man. Time will show."

"Is he to be buried down here?" inquired the curious Perkis.

"No. He's to be taken up to London to-night, to be buried in his wife's family vault at Kensal-green."

"That's a pity," said Perkis. "There'd have been half the county to follow, if they'd have buried him at Kingsbury. Murders in London are as plentiful as blackberries, judging from the Sunday papers. He won't get so much honour paid him there."

They went on to discuss the probable issue of the coroner's inquest, which was to take place at two o'clock that day—the nature of the death-wound, and the weapon that had inflicted it, about which points there were divers opinions, no exact knowledge having penetrated to the world outside Clevedon Hall. Richard Redmayne stood by and listened, but said nothing, except when he was appealed to by Mr. Perkis or the gardener, who addressed themselves to him occasionally as a point of politeness.

"The police are on the right tract, you may depend upon it," said Perkis; "you always see that in the newspapers. The police are on the tract; and although nothink is known for certain, they hopes soon to be able to put their hand upon the right party, being in possession of hinformation which they don't rec

themselves at liberty to divulge. That's what they always tell you in the papers; and depend upon it, Mr. Bond, the police are on the tract in this case. Do you think it was a gun or a pistol that it was done with?"

"Captain Hardwood's groom was down here before breakfast exercising that skittish mare of his master's, and he told me the doctors had extracted half-a-dozen swan-shot; so it must have been a gun, and it must have been done by some one that didn't plan it beforehand. No man would load his gun with swan-shot to commit a murder."

"There's no knowing, Mr. Bond," replied Perkis, with a suggestive air. "The worst a man is, the more artfuller he goes about his wickedness. The swan-shot may have been meant to throw parties off the scent. But what I can't make out is the motive. There never was a crime without a motive."

"Unless it was done by a madman," said the gardener. "This murder seems like a madman's murder, to my mind."

"Don't say that, Mr. Bond; that's what I call flying in the face of the law of the land. A man has only got to do something more atrociouser than the common run, and he gets put down for a lunatic."

Richard Redmayne stood among them for a little while, listening idly, and then moved towards the park, intending to revisit the scene of last night's tragedy; but at this point the gardener stopped him.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Redmayne," he said—"of course you're not a stranger—but I've had strict orders from the police, and I'm obliged to act by them. Nobody is to go into the park to-day."

"Why not?"

"I don't know the why or the wherefore; but it's the police that give the order, and we're all bound to abide by it."

"Of course. It doesn't matter; I'm not curious about the business. But if any one was suspected, or taken to prison, or anything of that kind, I should like to know. You might send some one down to Brierwood and let me know."

"Very well, Mr. Redmayne; I'll send you word if anything happens."

A lad came up at this moment, bursting with self-importance—the rapture of possessing information as yet unshared by these village worthies. The men recognized him by his aspect as the bearer of tidings.

"Well, Jim, any more news?"

"I should think there were, indeed," replied the youth, swelling as he spoke. "They've been and found the gun as it was done with."

"Ah!" said Mr. Bond, "they've found the gun, have they?"

Then the rest is easy work. They'll soon find the man that fired it." He watched Richard Redmayne meditatively as he walked away from the gates and along the white high road.

"Strange that he should take such an interest in the business as to want a special message sent him, isn't it?" he remarked.

"Yes, it is, Bond," replied Mr. Perkis; "but since he come home from Australia there ain't a stranger man going than Rick Redmayne. It's that blessed gold out yonder as turns their brains, that's my belief. It ain't natural that a man should dig gold out of the earth, just as if it was mangold wurzel; and if a man goes against nature, he must expect to pay the penalty of his opposition."

"True," ejaculated Mr. Bond. "In the sweat of his brow—that's what the Scripture says; there's nothing about gold-digging and hundredweight nuggets there."

CHAPTER XLIII.

"YES, BROTHER, CURSE WITH ME THAT BALEFUL HOUR."

AN awful gloom and silence, as of the grave itself, had fallen upon Clevedon Hall. No merry click of billiard-balls, no little gushes of silvery laughter, no bass accompaniment of masculine voices, blending with and sustaining the sweet feminine trebles; no dashing performance of Chopin or Scholoff on the grand piano in the drawing-room; no melodious tinkling of waltzes on the smaller pianos in upper chambers consecrated to the fairer guests; no flutter of silken draperies in halls and on staircases; none of that pleasing bustle which pervades a house full of guests; only dusky rooms, from which the sunlight was scrupulously banished—only gloom and silence and horror and despair.

The majority of Lady Clevedon's visitors had already taken to themselves wings, and departed by the earliest morning trains, leaving scared maids and unwilling valets to bring their belongings after them. Who could care to linger on a scene that had been defiled by the red hand of murder? The fine old Elizabethan mansion, smiling in the clear morning light across a broad sweep of dewy lawn, seemed to those departing guests like a monstrous charnel-house, behind whose stately walls there lurked all the unutterable horrors of the grave. The visitors fled as soon as possible after daybreak, leaving epistles grateful and sympathetic for their host or hostess, as the case might be, feeling sure that, at such a time, dear Lady Clevedon would rather be alone; and so on, and so on.

"Egna, you see, if a fellow stopped, he might find himself

accused of the murder," said Captain Hardwood confidentially to the *fidus Achates* of the moment. "I think I shall look out for some German Spa, where the extradition treaty doesn't hold good, or charter a two-hundred-ton yacht and do the South Sea Islands. I'm told there's no end of fun to be had in the Pacific."

The Clevedon servants had been swift to clear away all traces of the festival that had come to so evil an ending. Faded garlands had been whisked into chaos, gay draperies and decorations gathered up into bundles and carried away, and the rooms looked grand and solemn in their dusky emptiness. The murdered man lay upstairs in the bedchamber which he had occupied as a guest, and a bed had been hastily put up for his wife in the dressing-room adjoining. Here she sat alone—an awful statue-like figure, with a face as white as that hidden face in the next room—sat with hands locked on her knee, and fixed eyes looking into space.

Lady Clevedon had offered to bear her company through that dismal night and in that dreary hopeless noontide—had even implored permission to sit with her, standing outside the door, and pleading with tears, "Dear Mrs. Harcross, do let me be with you. I won't speak, I won't worry you; only let me sit by your side." Augusta only shook her head, and motioned dumbly to her maid to answer for her. Tullion, the maid, she suffered to be with her, as she would have suffered a dog—a creature whose presence or absence could make no difference.

She had seen him laid upon his bed at midnight; had stood quietly by while the surgeons examined his wounds; had refused to be banished from that death-chamber with so stern a resolution, that they had been obliged to succumb and let her stay; and when all was done, she wandered to and fro between the rooms, or sat silent as she was sitting now, like humanity transformed into marble. How fondly, how entirely she had loved him! She had known always that he was very dear to her, but not till now had she estimated the full force of her passion. She had lived her own life—had chosen for herself an existence of dressing and visiting and receiving, had made her public and official career the all-absorbing business of her life—and yet she had loved this man with all her heart and soul. Only she had kept her affection under lock and key, in a cold cautious spirit; she had feared to trust him with the whole sum of her love, any more than she trusted him with her fortune; she had kept her heart settled upon herself, as it were, for her own separate use and maintenance. It was enough for him to know that she had condescended to become his wife, that he was not obnoxious to her. The passion, the depth, the ardour of her love she held in reserve.

She thought of all this now that he was dead, and knew that she had cheated him, and had cheated herself even more utterly

—cheated herself of the love that she might have won had she been generous enough to confess her own fondness, if she had been less intent upon receiving her due, less anxious to measure her tenderness by his affection, and even then to give him somewhat short measure. He was dead; and it seemed to her now as if he had made up the sum of her existence, as if this one figure, of which at the best she had seen very little, had filled her world; that the dressing and visiting had been the merest formulæ; the pretty filling-up of empty spaces in her life, all subservient to her love for him and her pride in him. She knew now how fondly she had built on his future—the distinction he was to win for her, the pinnacle they were to occupy side by side in days to come. He was gone, and the future was a blank. "What am I without him?" she asked herself piteously. Her youth and wealth and beauty counted as nothing now that he was no more.

His loss was in itself a calamity so overwhelming that, in this first stage of her grief at least, she thought little of the manner in which he had died. The one fact that he was taken from her filled her mind to the exclusion of every other consideration. How was she to live without him? That was the all-absorbing question. Accustomed from babyhood to consider herself the beginning and end of creation—or, at least, of so much of creation as at all concerned her—she thought now of this awful event only as it affected her own interests and her own feelings.

She thought—yes, even in this first day of her widowhood, while she sat speechless, the very type and image of despair—she thought of the house in Mastodon-crescent, and how useless its splendours would be to her henceforward. Could she bring the lights of the legal world, the stars and celebrities of the town, to that luxurious mansion? Could she give dinners that should be talked about, or make her *cordons bleus* an aid to her ascent of Fortune's ladder? Alas, no, the light was extinguished. She was only a rich widow, whom the world—saving perchance some few adventurous spirits in need of rich wives—would surely hasten to forget. It had been a pleasant thing to fancy Hubert Harcross only an attendant upon her steps, best known as the husband of the handsome Miss Vallory; but in this awful hour of enlightenment, it dawned upon her that it was she who had been the satellite.

The preparation of the bed in the dressing-room had been lost labour. Not once during that dismal night did Mrs. Harcross lie down, although Tullion implored her to try to rest a little—to sleep, if possible.

"Don't worry me!" she exclaimed impatiently, with hot dry lips that would scarcely shape the words. "I am not very likely to sleep for months to come."

At noon on the day after the murder, Sir Francis came to beg for a brief interview. There was a tiny boudoir opening out of the dressing-room, a mere slip of a room, which had once been an oratory, but was now furnished with a couple of tapestried arm-chairs, a writing-table in the window, and a dainty little book-case. Sir Francis begged that he might see Mrs. Harcross for a few minutes in this room. After some carrying to and fro of messages by Tullion, and after at first positively refusing to see any one, she consented with a weary air, and rose to go to the room where Sir Francis was waiting for her.

"You'll put on a fresh morning dress, won't you, ma'am?" gasped Tullion, aghast at the idea of her mistress appearing in tumbled muslin and crushed valenciennes, even at this juncture; but Mrs. Harcross put her aside impatiently, and went into the boudoir, a ghost-like figure, in limp white robes, with loose hair falling on her shoulders.

Sir Francis was standing by the open window, darkened by closed Venetian shutters, through which the summer light stole softly, tempered with shadow.

"My dear Mrs. Harcross," he said gently, "we are all so sorry for you. I have no words to express what we feel; and words are so idle at such a time. But I thought it best, even at the risk of paining you, to plead for this interview. There are some things that must be spoken about, and that cannot be spoken of too soon."

"O God!" she cried, looking at him fixedly, with despairing eyes, "you are so like him!"

"Good heavens!" thought Sir Francis, "what a dolt I was to forget the likeness! I ought not to have come near her yet awhile."

He placed a chair for her by the open window.

"Let my likeness to your lost husband constitute a claim upon your friendship," he said, "and trust in my earnest desire, my determination, to see justice done upon the assassin. I want you to help us in this, if you can. You may be able to furnish some clue to this most mysterious crime. Had your husband any enemy? Do you know of any one he can have offended—any one desperate enough to do such a deed?"

"No," she answered, "I know of no one whom he had ever injured. I never heard that he had an enemy. But I know that he had a dislike to coming to this place, and I made him come."

"He had a dislike to coming here?"

"He objected strongly, and had good reasons for his objection, though I cannot tell them to you. If he had trusted me in the first instance, if he had only told me the truth at once, we should not have come. But I brought him here against his will,—brought him to meet his death."

Sir Francis looked at her wonderingly, half inclined to think that her mind was wandering.

"You can give me no clue, then, dear Mrs. Harcross?" he asked gently.

"None."

"Then we must work on without your help. The police have been busy since daybreak; they have communicated with the stations all along the line, and any suspicious-looking person will be stopped. We have telegraphed to Scotland-yard for a couple of detectives, and I have telegraphed to Ryde for Mr. Vallory. I thought you would like to have your father with you at such a time."

"My father can do no good here," said Augusta listlessly; and then she went on with a sudden intensity of tone and manner, "Yes, you must find out who murdered him. It is *your duty*."

"My dear Mrs. Harcross, I feel that most deeply. My friend and my guest has been foully murdered within half a mile of my house, within the boundary-wall of my home. Do you think that I can do less than feel myself bound to see him avenged?"

Augusta Harcross smiled—a strange bitter smile.

"You have good reason to feel that," she said.

There was a short silence. It was so impossible to say anything of a consolatory nature—a death so sudden, so awful—a man stricken down by an unseen hand in the very flower and pride of his life—there seemed no room for comfort. The common phrases, the pious banalities with which friends try to beguile the mourner, would have been worse than idle here. As well might the consoler have approached Calphurnia while her dead Cæsar still lay bundled in his bloody mantle at the base of the statue, as seek to murmur soothing sentences to this lonely woman whom sudden doom had widowed.

"It is very hard to be obliged to speak of this, Mrs. Harcross," began Sir Francis, hesitating a little, although he had come prepared to speak of this very thing; "but there is the question of the funeral to be decided, and promptly. Where would you wish your husband to be buried?"

She gave a little cry of anguish, and covered her face with her hands; but after a few minutes, replied very calmly,

"In our family vault at Kensal-green; there is no other place. My mother is buried there. I hope to be buried there myself."

"He has no family grave of his own—with his own people, I mean—where he would have wished to lie?" Sir Francis inquired.

"No."

"And you would not like him to be buried at Kingsbury, where the Clevedons, except my father, are all buried?"

"O no, no."

"That will do, dear Mrs. Harcross. I need torment you with no further questions. Mr. Vallory—your cousin Weston, I mean—has been most indefatigable; and I know you will trust him and me with all minor details."

He lingered to say a few words in praise of the dead man, touching gently on his social and professional value, and the manner in which his loss would be felt, and then begged most earnestly that Georgie might come to sit with the mourner.

"You know you have always been fond of her," he said, "and she is devoted to you, and is really made quite miserable by your refusal to see her. I do not say that she would comfort you, but her company would be better than this awful solitude. Or if you would come to her room—that would be better still."

"You are very good; but I'd rather be alone—I'd rather be with him." This with a piteous glance towards that darkened chamber where the dead lay.

"But, dear Mrs. Harcross, you would be so much better away from these rooms. There will be people coming by and by—the coroner and others—people who must come. Pray be persuaded."

"No," she answered doggedly; "nothing can make his death seem worse to me than it does now. I would rather stay."

Sir Francis pleaded still further, but in vain, and finally left her, full of pity, and painfully impressed with the futility of all endeavour to console.

He went away, and in the corridor met Georgie, whom he had scarcely seen since yesterday's luncheon. He had been up all night in conference with the police and other local authorities, or talking over the details of the night's tragedy with Captain Hardwood and two or three others who had congregated in the smoking-room, averse to the solitude of their own chambers.

"Poor Harcross! the last kind of fellow you'd have expected to go off in that way," said the Captain, as if Mr. Harcross had died of apoplexy.

"Have you seen her?" asked Georgie; upon which Sir Francis described his interview with Augusta.

"Poor soul! O Francis, it is so dreadful for her, and it is doubly dreadful to me." They were standing in the morning-room, where they had gone while Sir Francis was telling his story, the room in which she had waited for her husband vainly yesterday evening, longing for that explanation which had not yet come.

"My darling," said Sir Francis tenderly, "I know it is a hard trial for you; but how much harder it must be for her!"

"O Francis, if it had been you!" That was a position which he was hardly able to imagine, so he only shrugged his shoulders

with a melancholy air. "And it might have been you," his wife went on,—*"it might have been you."*

"Well, I really don't see how I could have been the victim, my dear. There must have been *some* motive, you know, however inadequate. Poor Harcross must have done something to provoke the scoundrel's animosity—some man he had unwittingly ruined, perhaps, by winning a lawsuit against him. There are fellows capable of brooding upon an imaginary wrong of that kind till they lash themselves into madness."

"What if he were the victim of an error, Francis? What if the murderer mistook him for you?"

"Mistook him for me, Georgie? What are you dreaming about? Why should anybody want to murder me?"

"Have you never done anything to provoke any one's hate, Frank—years ago, when you were more reckless, perhaps, than you are now? Is there no secret of your past life that occurs to you with alarm at such a time as this? have you nothing to fear, nothing to regret? You have said sometimes that you have told me all the history of your life; but was there not one page you kept hidden, one sad dishonourable passage that you could not bear me to know? O my dearest, be truthful to me! Nothing you have done in the past, no sin of the past or of the present, could lessen my love for you. Tell me the truth, Frank, even now, late as it is!"

"Upon my word of honour, Georgie, I don't in the faintest degree understand the drift of all this. I have told you every thing about myself. I have never kept a secret from you, either great or small."

"Then you have never provoked the hatred of Richard Redmayne? You were never at Brierwood?"

"Where is Brierwood? I don't even know that."

"O Frank, your face looks so true, and yet it was the face in the locket that man showed me; the face of his daughter's lover."

"What locket? what daughter? Really, Georgie, it is rather too bad to bewilder me in this way."

"Mr. Redmayne accuses you of having run away with his daughter, and he showed me a locket with your miniature."

"Accuses me of running away with his daughter! And when, pray?"

"Five years ago."

"And from Brierwood in Kent, I suppose. When you ought to know that I was never in Kent at all till I came home last year, and never had a miniature painted before the one that was done for you. Upon my honour, Georgie, our domestic life is not likely to be very pleasant, if you are going to spring this kind of mine under my feet occasionally."

For some minutes after this Sir Francis Clevedon was inclined to be angry, and Georgie had to be apologetic, and to assure her husband that she had never doubted him, no, not even for a moment; only—only she had been very unhappy, and that dreadful man had seemed so positive, and to have such strong grounds for his accusation, and the miniature was the very image of her darling Frank.

"It may have been poor Harcross's picture," suggested Sir Francis.

"O no, it was much too handsome, and much too young."

"But it was painted when he was five years younger, you see, Georgie, and it may have been a flattering likeness then."

"It may," said Georgie doubtfully. "But it was your face, looking at me with dreamy grey eyes. O Frank, think what I must have suffered."

"Then you must have doubted me, Georgie, and that was a crime,—matrimonial high-treason. But for heaven's sake, tell me all about this man Redmayne, and his accusation. The clue to this murder may be in that."

"I know that he was dreadfully angry," answered Georgie, "and that he seemed desperate, like a man who could do anything."

Questioned closely by her husband, Georgie described the scene in the library, repeating as faithfully as she could every word that had been spoken by Richard Redmayne.

"This would fairly account for Harcross's objection to come here," thought Sir Francis.

He kissed his wife, and gave her a free pardon for that offence which he had called matrimonial high-treason.

"But don't do it again, Georgie. You might take up some other delusion, and I might not be able to prove an alibi quite so easily. And now I must go and talk to Vallory about this business, and perhaps to Mr. Rufnell the constable."

"O Francis, will they hang that poor farmer?"

"Inevitably, I should imagine, if he shot Harcross."

"But he had been so badly treated—his daughter tempted away from him."

"Granted, my dear; but the law does not recognize the shooting of seducers."

"O Francis, I should be so sorry if that poor man were hung. I felt for him so deeply when he told me his story, even though he was accusing you."

"I am sorry for him too, Georgie. It is a bad business altogether. But I have only one duty in this matter, and that is to see my guest avenged."

He went down to his study, a solidly-furnished business-like apartment in an obscure portion of the house abutting on the

offices—a room in which he was wont to receive Mr. Wort, and which had now been made the head quarters of the committee of investigation—a room to which they could come freely at any moment. Sir Francis found Weston there, in thoughtful solitude, smoking a cigar by the open window, which, as it looked only upon the stable-yard, had not been darkened.

To him Sir Francis repeated the conversation reported by Georgie, particulars which were not new to this gentleman.

"Yes," said Weston, throwing away the end of his cigar, after he had smoked it out with a meditative aspect, "yes," he repeated with exceeding deliberation. "I don't think there's room for a doubt. Redmayne's the man."

"But do you suppose there was any truth in his notion about his daughter?"

"Unquestionably. Harcross had spent a summer at Brierwood—just five years ago—and was uncommonly shy upon the subject—never would talk of it, or even tell the name of the place till it was dragged out of him. I felt sure there was something; but I did not know it was anything so serious as this."

Mr. Rufnell the constable came in while they were talking, with an important air, as of a man whose genius had coped with stupendous difficulties, and emerged victorious from the struggle.

"I think we've got a clue, Rufnell," said Sir Francis gravely.

"Have you, sir?" said the constable, with a saturnine smile.

"Very likely, sir; but I've got the man."

"What, you've found out——"

"I've got him, sir; leastways, I've got his gun, which is pretty much the same thing. The man is Joseph Flood, your groom; and we've got as neat a chain of circumstantial evidence agen him as was ever laid before a jury."

CHAPTER XLIV.

"SOME INNOCENTS 'SCAPE NOT THE THUNDERBOLT."

RICHARD REDMAYNE went home with that innocent blood upon his head, a miserable man. The burden of his crime had sat lightly enough upon his conscience so long as he believed that he had slain his daughter's false lover. Indeed, in his judgment the act had been no crime, only a just and reasonable revenge.

But to have murdered a man who had never injured him—to have shed innocent blood! That was different, and the burden of *this* fatal unnecessary deed weighed him down to the ground.

He went home to Brierwood, but not to rest. There was a

nameless horror in the place—a horror of stillness and narrowness and airlessness. The familiar rooms seemed no wider than a prison cell—in the garden there was neither air nor freedom, only a sultry heat that stifled him. The sound of Mrs. Bush's voice droning some ancient ditty, with a quavering turn at the end of each line, jarred upon his nerves to excruciation. He was in that state of mind in which a man can hardly support his own existence—in which his most natural impulse is to blow out his brains. Richard Redmayne had thought of this manner of escape from a present that was intolerable into an unknown future. He had gone upstairs to his room and had handled his pistols; had stood for a few moments irresolute with one of them in his hand, looking down the barrel, and thinking how swift a settlement that might make of all his perplexities. Yet after that brief deliberation he put the revolvers back into their places.

"I must see the end of this business," he said to himself. "It would be a cowardly thing to turn my back upon it."

Had it not been for this thought—had it not been for the apprehension that some innocent man might be charged with his crime—how gladly would he have fled from that narrow world to the wide pastures and broad blue lakes of his beloved Gippsland; to that newer wilder life beyond the fern-tree scrub, among the waters of many rivers winding down from breezy mountain-tops, to that fresh untrodden world, where he could wander with his gun from sunrise to sunset shooting wild duck or bandicoot—where he had the freedom and the power of a savage king! For all the days of his life until now he had loved this Kentish homestead with an abiding affection—had preferred it above all other scenes, however glorious in their wilder beauty; but to-day his heart sickened at sight of the narrow fields, the patch of fertile landscape shut in by woods and hills that seemed to be within his arm's length. To-day he was seized with a wild yearning for that other home beyond the southern sea.

"O God, why could I not wait?" he asked himself. "Why could I not wait to be sure of my man? My wrongs had kept so long, that they might have kept a little longer. Was there any fear that my hatred would grow cold? And to fire like that—at random—in the dark! Yet I could swear that it was his face I saw—it was a trick that the devil played upon me, perhaps. And I might have drunk more than usual yesterday—I daresay I did. My brain was on fire after I had seen him, and I may have drunk a good deal without thinking what I was doing. Yet, my senses were clear enough when I fired that gun, and I can swear that it was his face I saw in the moonlight."

He was not a superstitious man—was indeed too unlearned for much superstition. But he had heard country folks talk

of witchcraft, and began to think he had been the dupe of some diabolical influence, so very certain was he that the face in the miniature was the face of the man he had slain.

He walked up and down by the broad flower-border where the roses were still blooming—the roses she had loved and cared for—not slim aristocratic standards, but broad spreading bushes or veritable trees straggling upward in unkempt profusion. There were many of them older than himself, bushes from which his young wife had gathered nosegays for the Sabbath-day adornment of the best parlour; old-fashioned cabbage and maiden's blush and white and red moss roses, no *Gloire de Dijon*, or *Malmaison*, or Lady Banks, or later fashionable products of the floriculturist's art.

He paced to and fro in an agony of doubt and expectation. It was long past two, and the inquest at Clevedon was on, if not over. What would be the result? An open verdict, perhaps—by some person or persons unknown! In that case what should he do? Consider his own safety, his own inclination, and start at once for Brisbane? How if he chose that selfish course, the natural course for guilt; and how if, when he was gone, circumstances should so shape themselves as to weave a halter for the neck of an innocent man? A luckless wretch might be suspected, tried, and hung before he could hear of it yonder.

"No," he said to himself resolutely; "I'm not such a scoundrel as that! I'll stand to my guns. So long as there's no mistake made, I'll hold my tongue. But if an innocent man should be in danger, I'll give myself up."

He thought of the result of that act. It would be a hard thing to die a shameful death before the eyes of the people who had known him, and respected and liked him, from a boy; to bring the name of Redmayne, the good old name, for whose redemption from the stain of debt and difficulty he had worked so hard out yonder; to bring that time-honoured name under so deep a disgrace, that no future generations of honest Redmaynes could ever wash the foul blot away. To stand confessed before the world as a midnight assassin, a wretch who had not even given his foe a chance of defending himself, a purposeless shedder of blood, whose crime bore a double odium for having been a blunder! He fancied himself hooted upon the scaffold, and jerked into eternity amidst the execration of his fellow-men. He fancied what Jim and Mrs. Jim would say when the hideous news came to them, and a vision of that fair home which he was never too see again, and of all the things that he might have done there in years to come, arose before him. Those future unknown years seemed strangely sweet to him now that he had forfeited the right to live them.

He had eaten nothing since yesterday, but he did not get through these dismal hours of suspense without an occasional "nobbler." A slow fever devoured him, and his dry lips needed to be moistened now and then, although the spirit which he drank raw to day did not exercise a cooling influence upon his system. In vain did Mrs. Bush urge him to pick a bit of a savoury roasted spare-rib of pork with sage-and-onions, which she had prepared as an appropriate dinner for a sultry summer's day; "somethink light and tasty," as she remarked, when recommending it to her employer. "Do-ey try and eat a bit, now, Mr. Redmayne," she pleaded. "It don't do nobody any good drinking raw spirits on a hempty stomick. A glass of brandy's not half the harm if yer inside's lined with good victuals. But to go on pouring that burnin' stuff on yer emptiness is regular suicide. There's no call for you to be upset by this here murder; and when your spirits have had a turn like that, you seem to want something substantial to settle them."

Mr. Redmayne declined the spare-rib, however—nay, would not even sit down, or make any pretence of eating his dinner. He paced the garden, listened to the striking of the distant church-clock, and waited for tidings of the inquest. Somebody would surely bring the news he longed for, and yet dreaded.

Somebody did. At half-past five Mrs. Bush's goodman came home to his tea, a cool and pastoral meal of bread-and-butter and green-stuff, which he took in the backest of back kitchens, among Mrs. Bush's pails and mops and brooms and black-lead brushes; that industrious matron holding her principal kitchen, with its snow-white hearthstoned flags and shining range, a chamber far too sacred for the defilement of daily meals, and preferring to eat and drink as it were on the outskirts of Brierwood. Very quiet was Mr. Bush's usual return from his afternoon labour, nay, indeed, somewhat furtive and sneaking of aspect was Mr. Bush in a general way, as of a man who had never solved the mystery of his own existence, and felt himself more or less a mistake or superfluous atom in the scheme of creation. To-day, however, he approached the back kitchen with a victorious air, full to the brim and overflowing with startling information, and, unduly elated by the sense of his abnormal condition, no longer a man to be curtly told to eat his tea and look sharp about it, as Mrs. Bush wanted to clean herself, and wasn't going to have her back kitchen cluttered up with tea-things all the evening; a man to be deferred to rather, as the possessor of a treasure which it was in his power to impart or withhold.

"Well!" he began, with a pompous air, seating himself at the narrow window table beside the window-ledge, where the

blackening-brushes lived, and whence came a pungent odour of Day and Martin diluted with vinegar.

"Well, what?" cried Mrs. Bush sharply, as she hewed the big loaf with a broad kitchen knife. "Lord, how the man do stare! Don't sit with your mouth open like a scarecrow. What's the matter now?"

"O, well," growled Mr. Bush, "if you don't want to hear nothink, I don't want to talk. There's no call to take me up short like that, as if you was a-going to snap my nose off."

"It ain't handsome enough to tempt folks snapping at it," the matron replied contemptuously; "you look as big and puffed out as a Christmas turkey this afternoon. I suppose you've been loitering about Clevedon way instead of doing your work, and have heard something more about the murder."

"I haven't been loitering nowheres; but I may have heard somethink for all that," returned the outraged Bush with a wounded air.

"If you've got anything to say, say it," exclaimed Mrs. Bush, with supreme disgust; "if there's anything in this mortal world as I hate, it's shilly-shally."

"Well," said Mr. Bush solemnly, with his mouth half-full of bread-and-butter, and a Cos lettuce in his right hand poised over the salt-cellar; "the inquis is over; and as I come along the road home, who should come up along of me but Sam Grinway, and says he, 'Well, Bush, have you heard this here about the inquis?' and says I, 'No, Samuel; is the inquis over?' and says he, 'Yes, and I bin up by the west lodge and heerd all about it. They've brought in a verdick again Joseph Flood, Sir Francis's groom, and they've took him; and it was all along of Bond's daughter as he was jealous of, and she'd been carryin' on shameful with this here Mr. Arkwright, which was a swell from London; and Joseph went proling about after dark with his gun—and took and shot him!'"

"A bold-faced hussy!" cried Mrs. Bush indignantly. "I allus said she was no good, flaunting and flaring with her starched print frocks and neck-ribbons, in spite of her father being as pious a Primitive Methody as you'd find between here and Maidstone. Why, it's her that ought to be hung, if there was any right or reason in the law of the land, and not the young man as did it."

Mr. Bush chumped his green-stuff meditatively, and responded to this proposition only by a dubious shake of his head. The tracing of criminal acts back to their first causes was an advanced idea which he hardly saw his way to.

"Joseph Flood did it," he said, "and Joseph Flood must swing for it. The gal may ha' been flighty, I won't say as she

warn't, but gals will be gals; they've as good a right to that saying as b'ys has to be b'ys."

"Hah!" exclaimed Mrs. Bush, with suppressed contempt, "If a gal happens to be good-looking, every fool in the parish will stand up for her. Lord a-mercy, Mr. Redmayne, what a turn you did give me, to be sure!"

This ejaculation was evoked by the apparition of Richard Redmayne looking in at the open lattice. He had come to the window in time to hear the news about Joseph Flood.

"Is Flood in prison?" he asked, with an ashen face which struck terror to the soul of Mrs. Bush.

"Yes, sir; they've put him in Kingsbury lock-up, if Samuel Grinway speaks the truth, and I never knowed Samuel to tell a falsehood."

Mr. Redmayne waited to hear no more, but walked away from the window, went into the house to refresh himself with a final nobbler, and then set his face towards Kingsbury. No innocent man should lie in durance for his sin.

"Lor, Bush!" cried the matron in a feeble voice, as if ready to sink swooning on the back-kitchen bricks; "did you ever see anyone so gashly pale as master was, when he looked in at that winder? If Joseph Flood had been his own son, he couldn't have looked more took aback!"

CHAPTER XLV.

"BY THE SAME MADNESS STILL MADE BLIND."

RICHARD REDMAYNE skirted the fields once more by the familiar track, beholding the free and happy barley with indifferent eyes, all his agricultural instincts in abeyance, with no room for any other thought in his mind than that he was going straight to his death. Not once did the steady course of his thoughts swerve from that direct line; not once did he speculate on remote possibilities of escape from the law's worst penalty. He was going to give himself up to justice; he was going straight to his death.

Strange how his thoughts fled yonder, even in this dire hour, over the width of half the world, to that other land where the skies are brighter and bluer, and the very air has an influence which makes men glad. O fair Gippsland, never more should he wander on her plenty-yielding plains, or climb her mighty mountains; never more should he shoot wild duck on her inland seas, or follow the winding river from its upland water-shed, or spend adventurous nights hunting for strayed sheep; or sleep away the summer noontide in the deep shade of a fern-tree

gully, while his weary beasts enjoyed their spell close by; or short-hobble his horses under the moon on that liberal half-mile margin of pasture which the squatter's generous rule allows to the traveller's cattle. All that bright free open-air life was lost to him; and it seemed to him now, in this sudden darkness which he deemed the shadow of a swift advancing doom—it seemed to him now that he might have been happy at Bulrush Meads even without Gracey—with a lessened happiness, of course, but still with a heartfelt appreciation of that bounteous land, and all it could yield him.

By one hasty mistaken act he had cut himself off for ever from these things. It would have been sad even, dying peacefully on his bed at Brierwood, to consider that he should see that new world no more. How much harder, then, to face the horror of an ignominious doom; to know himself the destroyer of that good old name which he would have given his life to uphold! And while suffering all this loss, to know that he left his daughter's tempter triumphant, his daughter's early death unavenged. That was the sharpest sting of all.

He walked slowly, and lingered now and then on his way, sitting down to smoke his pipe and think over his position. He was scarcely in a situation in which a man would care to hasten his steps. The sun was going down; the ripe corn melted into a sea of gold where the edge of the uplands met the western sky. It was a very beautiful world—on a small scale—a baby-world that had never attained to the vigour and grandeur of manhood, but had kept its infantine graces and childish dimples and smiles.

He looked at the peaceful scene fondly, with mournful loving eyes. How hard he had laboured that he might keep Brierwood and his own good name! And now both were gone—his name rendered for ever execrable, his estate confiscated as the property of a felon.

It was growing dusk as he crossed Kingsbury common. He had waited for that, not wishing to face the light of day when he should leave John Wort's cottage, like Eugene Aram, "with gyves upon his wrists."

Very peaceful was the aspect of Kingsbury this calm summer evening. The unwonted bustle and excitement of the morning had worn itself out. There may have been a few more gossips than the nightly conclave in the tap-room of the Coach and Horses, but that was all. A murder is an appalling event in the records of a country village; but people cannot stand still to talk about it for ever; there must come a period of exhaustion.

Richard Redmayne went straight to the little office tacked on to Mr. Wort's dwelling, lifted the latch, and went in. He had a notion that the steward would be at work here to-night; but

the office was empty—a dismal chamber to look upon in the dusk, with its unpainted matchboard walls, against one of which hung a dilapidated map of the Clevedon property, much scored about with a red pencil, its ink-splashed deal desk, and battered office stools. These shabby surroundings had the true business flavour, to John Wort's mind. He could not have worked in a room with easy-chairs and a Turkey carpet, like Sir Francis Clevedon's study. His business faculties would have been stultified by a morocco and mahogany desk on which he could not splash his ink freely.

Mr. Wort's housekeeper heard the door open and shut, and looked into the office from a door communicating with the kitchen.

"Is your master at home?"

"No, sir. He's been at Clevedon all day—not been home for a bit of dinner, even. But I expect him at any minute."

"I'll wait, then," Richard answered shortly. "You don't mind my pipe, I suppose?"

This was almost a superfluous question, since the office reeked with stale tobacco.

"O dear, no, sir. Master's a rare one to smoke."

The housekeeper retired, and Richard took out his blackened cutty-pipe. He smiled grimly as he filled it. How long would he be allowed this constant comforter? Would they let him smoke in prison?

He filled and refilled his pipe, and sat smoking on as the shadows deepened, till the wooden wall opposite to him was veiled in darkness. The woman peeped in and asked if he would like a light, but he answered in the negative. He would rather sit in the dark, he said.

By and by the moon began to climb the heavenly zone, and the first glimmer of her silvery light sent a shudder through Richard Redmayne's frame. That soft fatal radiance brought back the horror of last night.

"The moon's always been mixed up with witchcraft," he thought; "and there was something worse than witchcraft in last night's business. I'm not such a fool as to take one man for another in a light that I could have read my Bible by, if the devil hadn't blinded me."

It was past nine o'clock and broad moonlight when John Wort came home. He came in at the office door, his habitual practice, as he had generally letters or memoranda of some kind to deposit in his desk before he could settle down comfortably to his evening meal; sometimes even a letter or two to write for the night post, or for hand delivery to some defaulting tenant. He came in to-night with a very weary air, and recoiled with a start at sight of the seated figure, half in moonlight, half in shadow.

"What's the matter now?" he asked sharply, not recognising his visitor.

"A good deal," answered Richard Redmayne.

"Redmayne! Why, what brings you here again to-night? I thought you'd cut me."

"I'd good reason to do that, John Wort, for it was your lies that brought misery and death upon my poor child."

"My lies! What do you mean by that?" asked the steward quietly.

He was not going to put himself in a passion with Richard Redmayne, a man whom he had liked—whom he pitied with all his heart.

"What do you mean by calling me a liar, Rick? I never told you a falsehood in my life."

"What? Not when you brought your master to my house, under a false name?"

"My master! Why, man alive, what madness is this?"

"Your master, who had a fancy for coming to our neighbourhood on the sly, and stealing a look at his own estate, like a prince in disguise; or like a sneak and a liar, as he is by nature, and as he proved himself by his acts. 'Twas you who brought him to Brierwood, John Wort; 'twas you who lied about him to my sister-in-law. She would never have opened my doors to a stranger but for your recommendation."

"My master! My master at Brierwood!"

"Your master, Sir Francis Clevedon."

"Now, look here, Rick Redmayne," cried Mr. Wort, folding his arms upon the desk, and facing the farmer steadily in the moonlight, "make an end of this madness at once and for ever. Sir Francis was never in Kent, to my knowledge, until he came home to take possession of his estate just a year ago."

Richard Redmayne laughed aloud—a scornful strident laugh.

"What, you'll face it out, will you? He never came to Brierwood? You never brought him there, and planted him on my foolish money-grubbing sister-in-law as Mr. Walgry? Sir Francis Clevedon and your Mr. Walgry are not one and the same?"

"As there is a God above me, they are not!" answered Mr. Wort firmly. "Hubert Walgrave lies dead at Clevedon Hall! He changed his name to Harcross when he married an heiress."

Richard Redmayne started to his feet.

"What!" he cried, "is that the truth? Is it this man's likeness I've got here in my waistcoat pocket, the miniature that was sent to my girl? Why, it's the image of Sir Francis Clevedon! Do you mean to tell me that two men—strangers—could be so much alike as that; as much like each other as twin brothers?"

"There was a striking likeness between Sir Francis and Mr. Walgrave, though not such a close resemblance as you make out."

"Get a light and let me show you the miniature," answered Richard Redmayne.

The steward struck a lucifer, and lighted an oil lamp that hung over the desk. Mr. Redmayne put the open locket into his hand without a word.

"Yes," said John Wort, looking at it gravely. "This is a portrait of Hubert Walgrave; very much flattered, I grant, and making him pretty near ten years younger than he looked of late years; but not by any means a bad likeness for all that."

"His portrait!" exclaimed Richard, with suppressed exultation. "The likeness of the man who lies murdered at Clevedon Hall?"

"Yes," answered the steward impatiently. "How many times must I tell you the same thing?"

"Then God is just," cried Richard Redmayne; "I killed the right man!"

"You killed!" exclaimed Mr. Wort, aghast, staring at the farmer's triumphant face with unutterable horror in his own. "You killed him! You a murderer! Rick Redmayne, you must be mad!"

"No, John, not mad—not mad now, or mad then; never saner than when I fired that shot. Why, when I came home from Gipsland I meant to kill him."

"For God's sake don't tell me that! What, you, Richard Redmayne—a man we've all liked and respected; you that anybody in Kingsbury would have trusted, or stood by, through thick and thin—you confess to a dastardly murder?"

"Not a dastardly murder. I tell you I meant to have his life; was there anything less that would have wiped out the score between us two? If I'd asked him to fight me—as gentleman used to fight each other thirty years ago—do you think he'd have done it, or listened to me? I tell you there was no other way of settling *that* account. I was bound to kill him."

John Wort looked at him for some minutes in silent wonder, biting his nails doubtfully. No one but a raging madman would have talked like this, surely; and yet this man was perfectly calm and collected, and spoke with an air of conviction that was more strange than the fact of his guilt.

"Good God! Rick Redmayne," he exclaimed at last, with a groan, "what have you done?"

"Killed the man who killed my daughter. You call it murder: I call it justice."

"Why, you don't even know that it was this man poor Gracey went away with!"

"Don't I? What, not when he sent her his likeness? when he was the only man that ever had the opportunity of so much as ten minutes' talk with her? Why, this man lived in my house above a month; he was the only gentleman my Gracey knew—d—n him! Come, John Wort, you were a good friend to me in years gone by; speak the truth like a man. Have you any doubt that it was this fellow who tempted my girl away?"

"No," replied the steward emphatically, "*I have not!*"

And then after a pause he went on,

"He's dead, and it can't matter now. You've done your worst. Nothing would have wrung the admission out of me if he were still alive. I did suspect him of taking Grace away, and taxed him with it, as I told you long ago. He denied it—I told you the truth when I said that—but I never believed his denial. There was no one else. She was not a girl to have two lovers, and I had seen those two together one day at Clevedon. But he was such a steady-going fellow, and I thought he might be trusted. I'd known him from a boy, and had never known any harm of him; and there were circumstances in his life, family matters, that made me pity him. Upon my soul, Rick, I don't think I could have been more sorry for what happened if Gracey had been my own daughter. But, O, old friend, for God's sake say there was no meaning in your wild talk just now. It was not you who fired that gun last night,—Joseph Flood's gun. How should you have come by it?"

"The fellow was loafing about the park with it late last night. I thought that he was up to mischief, somehow, and I followed him a bit, and saw him hide his gun in that old summer-house. It was within reach of my arm when I saw *him* coming along the avenue, with the moonlight full upon his face. The devil put it in my way, handy."

"You must have been mad when you did it."

"Not any madder than I am now. It may have been a wild kind of justice, but I meant it for justice."

Mr. Wort groaned once more, and sat down upon the raggedest of the office stools, in blank dismal despair.

"What do you mean by coming here to tell me this, Richard Redmayne?" he inquired helplessly. "A pretty pickle you put me in. There's that poor innocent young man in the lock-up hard by; as an honest man, it would be my duty to inform against you."

"Do your duty," answered the farmer coolly. "I came here on purpose to give myself in charge."

"You did? And do you know what that means?—Maidstone jail for the next six weeks, to be tried for your life at the next assizes, and to be hung. O, Rick, Rick, to think that any man of your name should come to such an end as that!"

Richard Redmayne shrugged his shoulders, with a gesture that was nonchalant enough, but accompanied by a faint sigh.

"It's hard lines," he said; "Heaven knows I've tried to keep that name honest. When I was in debt hereabouts, I felt as if I was scorched through and through with a red-hot branding-iron, because no Redmayne of Brierwood had ever owed money he couldn't pay before my time. I worked hard, and wiped off that stain. But I suppose, when I'm dead and gone, the world will think worse of this business. And yet, John Wort, I'm not sorry that I killed him. I was sorry enough, ready to blow my brains out, when I thought I'd shot the wrong man. But, by the heaven above me, I do not repent of having killed my daughter's destroyer."

"Good God, Richard, what a hardened conscience you must have!"

"I don't know anything about my conscience, but I know I've been hardening my heart against that man for the last three years, and it wasn't likely I should deal over-gently with him when his time came. I hunted for him as well as I could; but I'm not good at that kind of hunting, and when I failed in that, I thought I'd wait. There's a fate in these things. Providence would throw him in my path sooner or later; the world is hardly wide enough to hide a man long from the just wrath of his enemy. So I bided my time quietly enough, but never parted with the hope that I should find him before I died. And when chance did throw him across my path, what would you have had me do?" asked Richard Redmayne, with a sardonic laugh. "Civilly tell him who I was, I suppose, and ask him to apologise for having broken my heart. No. I have dreamt of our meeting often enough, and all my dreams were coloured with blood. Why, I have felt my grip upon his lying throat many a time, and have seen his false face change and darken as my grasp tightened."

"You have nursed your hatred until it has grown into a monomania, Richard. You could hardly have been answerable for what you did last night."

"I was answerable: and I am ready to answer to God and man."

"Vengeance is mine," murmured the steward. "Don't seek to justify your sin in the eyes of God, Richard, but try to obtain His pardon. I don't want to preach a sermon to you; it's hard enough to be placed in such a situation as yours, and don't believe there ever was a man more to be pitied. I only say this—don't take pride in a stubborn heart, Richard. It's wiser to own yourself a sinner."

"I'll think of squaring that account by-and-by," answered the other in his reckless way; "*that* can stand over I want to set

matters right about that young man they've sent to prison. I want to take my burden on my own shoulders."

Mr. Wort leant his elbows on his desk, buried his face in his hands, and cogitated profoundly while Richard Redmayne coolly refilled his pipe, and lighted it at the office lamp.

What was he to do? Give this man into the custody of the patrol from Tunbridge who nightly perambulated the peaceful shades of Kingsbury—pass him on to the jail where Joseph Flood now lay in durance? Do this with the certainty—or something very close to certainty—that he was handing his old friend over to a shameful doom? John Wort felt as if he could not do this thing.

Was there no way of escape? No way by which Richard Redmayne could get clear off, and yet release young Flood from his present peril? Might he not draw up a confession of his guilt, get his signature attested by some one who should not know the real nature of the document, and then start for Australia, leaving his confession behind him? That would surely exculpate Joseph Flood, and yet leave the guilty man a chance of life and liberty. Mr. Wort was a man who respected the law and all its mysteries, but it did not appear to him that the world in general would be any better for the hanging of Richard Redmayne. He had also a just appreciation of the penalties to which an accessory after the fact would be liable; but he fancied he might suggest his friend's escape without incurring these. There was no money involved in the transaction, nor need the world ever know that he was cognizant of Richard Redmayne's crime.

"Look here, Rick," he said at last. "There's no one can think worse of what you've done than I do; but I know more of what's gone before than the rest of the world, and I won't be the man to hand you over to the hangman."

And then Mr. Wort went on to suggest, very clearly and concisely, that line of conduct which it seemed to him Richard might safely adopt.

"If they hunt you down at last," he said in conclusion,—"and they'll hardly do that, for you can get a good start of them—why, you'll have had a run for your life anyhow."

"No," said the farmer quietly, "I've done the deed, and I'll stand by it. It doesn't seem half so bad to me to stand in the dock now that I know I killed the right man. I'll face the world, John Wort, and let the world know how a man can punish the destroyer of his child. By heavens, if there were more such rough-and-ready justice in the world, there would be less villany. The law's a big machine that only moves in a certain groove. Let a man steer clear of that, and he may be as big a scoundrel as he pleases."

"What do you mean to do, then?"

"Give myself over to the police as soon as I leave this office. I thought you would have been in a hurry to do it for me; but as you're not, I suppose I must do it myself."

There was farther parley after this, but Mr. Wort's arguments were of no avail. Richard Redmayne went out into the summer night, and walked along the Tunbridge road till he met the patrol, to whom he told his story.

The man was at first incredulous. He knew Mr. Redmayne by sight, and had heard people talk of the strange secluded life he led at Brierwood. The poor fellow was a little off his head, no doubt, thought the policeman; but finding the poor fellow very resolute, he suggested that they should proceed forthwith to Clevedon—Sir Francis was a justice of the peace—and that Mr. Redmayne should there repeat his extraordinary statement.

It was late when they arrived at Clevedon; but Sir Francis was still in his study, with a London detective for his companion. This man had only arrived an hour before, his services not having been available at the moment the telegram arrived; and to this man Sir Francis had been relating all that Georgie had told him about Richard Redmayne.

"A curious story," remarked Mr. Winch, the detective, coolly; "and it certainly does seem at the first glimpse to have a bearing on the case. Yet it hardly comes to much when taken against the evidence of the gun, which Flood owns to; and of that girl he's been keeping company with, who, from what I can hear of the inquest, seems to have done him no end of harm with her hysterics, and her talk about his jealousy, and being afraid of him, and so on. It does not appear, from anything you tell me, that this Redmayne threatened violence towards you while under that delusion about the miniature; and unless he had threatened, the rest comes to nothing."

"A man may mean a good deal without threatening," said Sir Francis; "and you see in this case there has been a wrong done, and there was a strong motive. Lady Clevedon said the man had a desperate air, like a man who was capable of any rash act."

"But how did he come by your groom's gun? How do you get over the gun, sir?"

"I leave that problem for you to solve. All I can say is, that I know this Flood to be a good fellow; he's been with me only a twelvemonth, certainly, but I know something of his disposition, and he came to me with an excellent character from a gentleman near here. No, I cannot believe Joseph Flood to be an assassin."

The Baronet and Mr. Winch were still discussing the details

of the case, when the servant announced that a policeman, accompanied by another person, wished to see Sir Francis.

"Bring them in immediately," said Sir Francis.

"Some new evidence, I suppose," he added to the detective.

"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Winch, with a sarcastic air; "no doubt you'll have plenty of mare's nests brought you by the local police."

The job was a good one, and the accomplished Winch did not wish the local police to cut the ground from under his feet by any abnormal sharpness and activity.

Richard Redmayne walked first into the room, alone, unchackled, with his head more erect than he had carried it for a long time; a noble specimen of the English yeoman class, with something of the free grace of some wild forest creature in his bearing, which was even more noble than the sturdy British ruggedness. He was a handsome man still, in spite of the change and ruin that had come upon him; and as he stood calmly facing Sir Francis in the lamplight, with only the table between them, the Baronet thought that he had never beheld a more striking figure.

He guessed at once that this man must be Richard Redmayne.

The policeman told his story briefly, but with a good many "he says," and "I says," to carry him through it.

"And as you was the nearest magistrate, Sir Francis, and concerned in this business, as one may say, begging your pardon, Sir Francis, I thought as how I'd better bring him along here; and if you see any grounds for believing this 'ere rum start, why, you could make out a warrant and commit him. I could get a cart and drive him over to Tunbridge for to-night, and he can go on to Maidstone to-morrow; leastways, if you think there's any truth in his story."

"I have reason to know that his story is perfectly true," said Sir Francis, filling in the warrant as he spoke. "Abominable as his crime is, I am glad that he has at least enough good feeling left to prompt him to give himself up, rather than let an innocent man suffer for his wickedness."

"Yes, Sir Francis," replied the policeman, looking at Richard Redmayne with a lenient countenance; "and I hope as how that, and the fact of him and his having farmed their own land for the last three hundred year, will stand in his favour with the judge and jury."

The guilty man himself spoke not a word, but stood quietly waiting to be handed on upon the next stage of that brief journey which was to convey him to the gallows.

"I should be glad if you would repeat the statement which you made just now to the officer, Mr. Redmayne, here, in the presence of witnesses."

The man obeyed, unhesitatingly, telling his story in the plainest words, with no attempt to extenuate his conduct.

"A bad business from beginning to end," said Sir Francis, with a sigh. "You can remove your prisoner, officer. My people will accommodate you with a conveyance, and you can take a groom to Tunbridge with you, if you want one."

"Better let me go, Sir Francis," interposed Mr. Winch. "I'm better up to this kind of business than a groom; I rose from the ranks myself, sergeant."

Not a word more was said. The information was made out, and the warrant granted. Richard Redmayne waited with Mr. Winch in a lobby adjoining the housekeeper's room, while a dog-cart was being got ready for his speedy transport to Tunbridge. They drove at a smart pace through the moonlit country, every inch whereof was so familiar to the prisoner. He sat beside the driver with folded arms, silently watching the landscape as it sped past him; as if, looking on hill and valley, coppice and hedgerow, for the last time, he would fain have printed every feature of the scene upon his memory, as a picture which he might keep in his mind to brighten the gloom of his narrow cell.

Fear he had none, nor remorse, as yet; but he had a vague feeling that it was sad to turn his back upon so fair a world; to lose the glory of summer sunshine and the freshness of summer winds for ever.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"HOME THEY BROUGHT HER WARRIOR DEAD."

THEY carried all that remained of Hubert Harcross back to Mastodon-crescent—secretly, under cover of night, as befitted so solemn a transit. They set up the ponderous treble coffin on trestles, in that darksome den behind the dining-room, which was filled for the most part with law-books and parliamentary reports: the dismal chamber where the dead man had been wont to spend solitary hours in the stillest watch of the night.

They brought him home stealthily, when Mastoden-crescent was wrapped in sleep—that sleep of care-takers and lonely housemaids which falls upon western London out of the season. They brought him home and laid him in this darkened study, there to wait the final journey to the Vallory vault at Kensal-green, a grim square stone edifice, nearly as large as a modern villa, with an iron door of an Egyptian design that was eminently suggestive of mummies.

Mrs. Harcross came home the day after this midnight journey.

Georgie and Sir Francis had done their uttermost to persuade her to remain at Clevedon, but in vain.

"You are very kind to wish it, but I would rather be with him," she said piteously; as if there were indeed as much companionship between herself and that clay-cold corpse as there had been when those two were living man and wife.

Georgie would have gone to London to stay with her, but this offer too Mrs. Harcross declined.

"Indeed, I would rather be alone; nothing can make my loss any less or make me think of it any less."

Her father had arrived at Clevedon by this time, having sped thither as swiftly as his gout would suffer him to speed; and under her father's escort, Mrs. Harcross left Clevedon Hall to return to that splendid mansion which had been the cheerless home of her brief wedded life.

It was a dreary journey and a dreary business altogether for Mr. Vallory, and although he was sincerely attached to his daughter, he would gladly have deputed the task to Weston, who was languishing to be useful, and deeply wounded by his cousin's refusal to see him; a lengthy journey, although they travelled express, and shot the stations swift as a falling star. Augusta sat silent, with slow tears rolling down her pale cheeks every now and then. Once or twice Mr. Vallory made some feeble attempt to comfort; but the dead man's untimely end not coming in any way under the category of happy releases, he was sorely put to it to shape even the tritest consolatory sentence.

Across the dull agony of Augusta's grief there shot the sting of a sharper anguish—the biting pain of remorse. True that she had loved the dead man as deeply after her own nature as wife ever loved husband, but she had not the less cheated him of his due, locked her love in her own breast, starved him with cold words and disdainful looks, kept him at arm's length as it were, lest in coming too near he should discover that she was a very woman at best.

She had cheated him! that was the cruel truth which came home to her now. She had been proud of him, but had never acknowledged her pride; had paid him none of that tender tribute of praise and even sweet-savoured flattery which loving women give to their husbands, the humble flowers of speech which strew the path matrimonial, as village children scatter their blossoms before the feet of bridegroom and bride. Every man is more or less godlike in his own estimation, and the world must seem cold to that unappreciated hero for whom no altar fire burns at home. Hubert Harcross had been made to do without such domestic homage. If he came home to Mastodon—rescent glowing with a professional victory, and in a moment

of expansion communicated the particulars of his success, no rapture beamed in the eyes of his wife, no sympathetic word encouraged him to dilate upon his triumph; he was only told that that odious court had made him late for dinner, or that he had only half an hour to dress if he meant to keep his engagement in Portman-square.

She remembered these trifles, and many other details of her married life, to-day as she travelled swiftly towards that worse than empty house where her dead husband was lying. She remembered that interview in the picture-gallery at Clevedon Hall, when he had told her the secret of his life; remembered with a bitter pang how she had refrained from any expression of pity for him, and thought only of herself, and compassionated only herself, as if the great wrong done to him had been only a wrong against her. It was a bitter thing to reckon these small injustices, these petty slights, now, when the victim of them had passed beyond the reach of apology or atonement. Down to the grave must she carry this burden of a great debt; farther than the grave she could not look. She was a religious woman, in a church-going, strictly conforming sense, but she was not spiritual enough to be able to say, "We shall meet in a fair far-off land, where he will read my heart and forgive me!"

Very stately was the funeral which for one brief hour enlivened the emptiness of Mastodon-crescent. All that can be done by sable plumes and costly trappings, by solemn-visaged mutes and ink-hued Flemish horses, by mourning-coaches and close-shuttered broughams, was done to do honour to the dead. Augusta Harcross could not be dissuaded from accompanying her husband in that last journey. She went with her father in the first of the mourning-coaches, silent, ashy pale, but tearless. She stood beside the vault of the Vallorys, and saw the massive oaken coffin deposited in its stony niche, and looked at the empty place beside it, where she might lie when her time should come.

And so ended the story of her married life. She went home desolate to that abode of horrors, a spacious and splendid mansion where "love, domestic love no longer nestles;" went home to find the blinds drawn up, open windows admitting the summer air, the rooms and balconies bright with flowers; a smirking pretence that there had been no such thing as a death in the family palpable everywhere.

A strange fancy seized her when she had sent her father home to Acropolis-square to nurse his gout, and had thus got rid of his clumsy attempts at consolation—a fancy for looking at the dead man's rooms on the third floor, the very thought whereof in this day of remorse had been one of her small tortures. Those third-floor rooms were one of the many trivial slights she had put upon him, one of the little ways by which she had

suffered him and the household to know that he was only a secondary personage in that establishment.

She went up the servants' staircase, a roomy staircase enough, for everything in this stately district was built on wide lines, out of a somewhat chilling aspect, the stairs covered with floor-cloth, the walls painted a dingy drab. She went up to the spacious chamber which she had so rarely entered during her husband's lifetime. It was not a cheerful room: the windows on this story had been designed with a view to external effect; the sills were breast high, the lower panes of plate glass obscured by the stone cornice outside them. There was plenty of light, but the windows revealed nothing of the outer world, only three patches of summer sky, no glimpse of verdant park or cheerful squares. The room was large and bare. Mr. Harcross had repudiated all finery. A huge metal bath occupied one end, with all its works and pipes exposed like a skeleton clock. There was a barren desert of floor-cloth, a low wide mahogany wardrobe, full of long narrow drawers (for the presiding genius of the tailoring art has discovered that to hang a coat is destruction), one cushionless oak arm-chair stood before the dressing-table, a chair of the severest school of upholstery, such a chair as Canute the Dane may have sat in when he put his flatterers to the blush on the edge of Southampton Water; two grim rows of boots on a stand masked the fireplace, half a dozen railway time-tables and a legal almanac adorned the space above the mantelpiece; picture, or bronze, or bust, or object of luxury there was none.

Augusta seated herself in the arm-chair, and looked round the room drearily. For how many conventional dinner-parties, for how many joyless receptions, Hubert Harcross had dressed himself in this room! How often and how often had he mounted that cheerless stair and put on the regulation costume, when it would have suited his humour so much better to dine at home and to dawdle away a lazy evening after his own pleasure, sleeping a little, reading a little, enjoying the rare privilege of rest! How often had he gone up to that room to dress, feeling like a slave at a wheel, grinding on for ever!

It was not possible that Augusta could fully comprehend how joyless this life of fashionable pleasure had been to him; but she did know that she had often insisted on his going out when he would rather have remained at home, that she had squared his days and hours by the rule and compass of her particular world, that she had never let him live his own life.

Very bitter is the memory of such small injuries when the victim of them lies dead.

Her eyes wandered slowly about the room that was so strange to her. The sparsely-furnished chamber had no strong

individuality of its own; it was not a room which even hinted at the history of its last occupant; there were no scattered evidences of his favourite pursuits, no traces of his presence. It was a room entirely without litter, and it is litter which most bespeaks the character of the tenant. You may read the history of a household on a dustheap sometimes better than in the bric-à-brac of a carefully arranged drawing-room.

"The room is like himself," Augusta thought; "it tells nothing of his life."

On one side of the fire-place there were three or four trunks and portmanteaus, one iron-clamped box, much larger than the rest, a shabby much-battered receptacle, decorated with the disfigured labels of various railway companies, the very box in which Hubert Walgrave had carried his books to Brierwood. On this massive chest Augusta's eyes lingered thoughtfully.

"I daresay he kept his papers in that," she said to herself:—"old letters, secrets perhaps; a man who told so little must have had secrets."

She took a bunch of keys from her pocket, and looked at them with a faint and bitter smile; the dead man's keys, on a ring with his name and address engraved upon it, each key distinguished by a neat ivory label.

"If he had any secrets, they are all in my power now," she thought. "Or was that one secret of his birth the only thing he ever kept from me? Whatever papers he has left I had better examine and burn them. I don't want all the world to know my husband's history."

She moved a couple of empty portmanteaus which surmounted the iron-clamped box, and then knelt down before it and opened it.

There were no papers in that capacious chest. Only a tangle of unmade silk dresses and cashmere shawls, French slippers, ivory-backed hair-brushes, daintily carved by the cunning hand of some Chinese artisan, fans, scent bottles, packets of primrose and lavender gloves—the things Mr. Walgrave had bought years ago for Grace Redmayne.

Mrs. Harcross dragged these objects out of the chest one by one, at arm's length, as if the very touch of them might have defiled her, and flung them in a heap on the floor. What did they mean? None of them had been used. They were tumbled and injured from rough packing, but all unworn. No scrap of paper, no vestige of letter or memorandum, helped to solve the mystery. There was nothing but this confusion of woman's clothing, a multitude of delicate and costly objects crammed pell-mell into a big box.

Having cast them forth in this way, Mrs. Harcross was presently obliged to put them back again. It would never do for the prying eyes of Tullion or of any domestic in that house

to rest upon those inscrutable silks and slippers and cashmeres and hair-brushes. She thrust them back into the chest, leaving them if possible in a worse condition than the state in which she had found them, put down the lid hastily, and locked and double-locked the receptacle. Then with a little wailing cry she clasped her hands across her brow, and sat, fixed as Niobe, upon the ground beside that box.

"They must have belonged to some one he loved," she said to herself. "What other reason could he have had for keeping them?"

Her quick eye had told her that the things were of modern fashion, made within the last few years; things that could not by any possibility have belonged to his mother, who had died more than thirty years ago. She could not comfort herself with that idea, as she might have done otherwise.

"That pale apple-green was in fashion the summer before my marriage," she said to herself, thinking of one of the delicate fabrics which she had stuffed relentlessly into the box. "Bouffante made me a dress of that very shade for a garden-party."

This was the bitterest pang of all. She could have forgiven the dead man for loving her with a measured affection, but not for bestowing unmeasured love elsewhere.

"He must have loved the owner of those things very dearly," she thought, "or he would hardly have run such a risk as to keep them."

Those cashmeres and packets of gloves and plumed and painted fans, such a heap of unworn finery discarded, had a look of luxury and recklessness. She thought of all the stories she had heard from worldly-wise matrons of bijou villas in the shades of Fulham or St. John's Wood, and it seemed to her that these things must have been part of the belongings of such a villa. The thought led her into a labyrinth of painful speculations. The last idea that could have entered her imagination was that only for a village maiden, tender and pure and true, had these fineries been chosen.

CHAPTER XLVII.

"WHY BANISH TRUTH? IT INJURES NOT THE DEAD."

RICHARD REDMAYNE was a prisoner in Maidstone jail. Very wearisome were the examinations and cross-examinations which were necessary before the indictment against the actual sinner was fairly made out, and the innocence of Joseph Flood so demonstrated as to admit of his release from custody. Ther

with the season of hop-gathering, and the long October nights lit here and there by camp-fires, came the assizes. Rick Redmayne, of Brierwood Farm, the kindly master, the cheerful open-hearted yeoman and trusty friend of years gone by, stood in the dock to plead guilty to a midnight assassination.

Never was there a profounder silence than that which held the court spell-bound when, after a verdict of guilty and a recommendation to mercy, the prisoner was asked if he had anything to say.

"Yes," answered Richard Redmayne, quietly. "There is something I should be thankful to say, with your lordship's leave. I should like the world to know why I shot that man."

And then in very plain and simple words, with a singular clearness and conciseness, he told Grace's story and his own. His return from Australia, his search, his discovery—only of a grave—his rooted conviction that the revealment of her lover's villainy had slain his daughter. He told the judge, in a few rugged, powerful sentences, what he felt as he sat in the moonlight watching his enemy's approach, and why he fired straight at that enemy's breast.

"I don't want anybody to say that I was off my head that night," he said in conclusion. "*I meant to do it.* I'd rather speak the truth and hang for it than be saved by a lie."

All the plausible rhetoric of a Thurtell or a Fauntleroy, airing a university education in the dock, would have seemed poor beside that unvarnished statement of facts. Already the jury had recommended the guilty man to mercy; the judge strengthened their recommendation by all the might of his own influence. Thank God, we do not live in hanging days! Of ten men doomed to the gallows six escape their doom, and Richard Redmayne was one of the six. Three days before the date appointed for his execution the jail chaplain informed him that the secretary of state had been pleased to commute his sentence to penal servitude for life.

Richard Redmayne gave a deep sigh of relief when he heard these tidings, but was not wildly elated like a man for whom the prospect of death had been full of terror.

"I thank you kindly, sir," he said very quietly. "I feel much beholden to you and the other gentlemen for having taken all this trouble to beg me off; and I'm very glad for the sake of the good old name that I'm not going to be jerked out of this world by the common hangman. But as far as my own feelings go, I think I'd as lief have ended my troubles even that way. Hard labour and a prison for the rest of one's life isn't a lively prospect for a man to look forward to."

"But it is a mercy for which you have good reason to be grateful, Redmayne," the chaplain answered gravely, "since it

will afford you time for penitence. A crime such as yours is not to be wiped out hastily, though we cannot reckon the mercy of God to sinners, or what special dispensation He may reserve for those who lie under the final sentence of the law. You have a great work to do for your soul in the years to come, Richard; for I fear your mind is not yet awakened to the enormity of your offence. Think how great a sin it was to lurk waiting for your enemy in the darkness of the night."

"It was broad moonlight," said Richard, bluntly; "he might have seen me as well as I saw him."

"The act was not the less treacherous," rejoined the chaplain. "Consider how great a sin it is to send a soul unprepared to stand before its Maker. And by your own showing this man had been a sinner; even his sin against your daughter may have been still unrepented of."

Richard Redmayne stood for a few moments looking at the ground in thoughtful silence before he replied to this suggestion.

"I don't know," he said at last, "but I think somehow that he was sorry;" and then he told the story of his last visit to the churchyard at Hetheridge, and of the garland of snow-white hothouse flowers. "I hardly think he'd have remembered her birthday, and gone yonder to lay that wreath upon her grave, if he hadn't been sorry. It would have been easier for him to forget her. If I'd remembered those flowers upon her grave that night at Clevedon, I don't think I should have shot him."

It was the first expression of any feeling like sorrow or regret which had dropped from Rick Redmayne's lips. The chaplain, although recognizing something noble in the man, had begun to fear he was a hardened sinner; but at this first indication that the stubborn heart could melt, the good man took courage, and grew more hopeful about his spiritual patient. He worked this vein with all his might before the prisoner was transferred to Portland: talked much of the dead girl, and of God's providence, which had snatched her from a world that was full of snares for helpless innocent wanderers, who had once strayed from the home-nest. He talked of that mysterious spirit-world, in which the secrets of all hearts are to be made manifest; a world where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, neither tears nor death, neither sin nor sorrow; where Richard Redmayne and his daughter, and his daughter's lover, might meet, forgiven and forgiving.

His labours were not in vain. It was with a softened spirit that the farmer left Maidstone jail and the country of his birth, with no last look at the stubble fields and busy hop-gardens of Brierwood, close guarded with other felons in a railway-van, roughly shipped as if they had been a small herd of cattle sent up to the London market.

But before the removal of this little band of delinquents to new quarters, Rick Redmayne had an interview with an old friend. John Wort, the steward, paid him a visit in his cell at Maidstone, on the last day of his residence there, and bade him a kindly farewell, not without some show of emotion, as sternly held in check as any rough-and-ready gruff-spoken man of business ever held his more tender emotions.

"Thank God they remitted the sentence, Rick," said the steward. "I dare say it seems hard enough to you to go to Portland. But, bless my soul, I hear the air is uncommonly healthy, and the diet good; and who knows how soon you may get a ticket-of-leave—if—if—you behave well, as of course you will, and attend chapel regular—though I suppose that'll be compulsory—and read your Bible, and what not, and make friends with the chaplain?"

"I'm a lifer," said Richard, grimly; "I don't suppose tickets-of-leave are dealt out very free to lifers."

"O, but there's no knowing. There are exceptional cases, you know. And favouritism goes a good way. You'll start with a good character, and be sure you make friends with the chaplain."

"I'll curry favour with no man," said Rick proudly.

"Curry favour! of course not; but you like your Bible, don't you? and you may just as well read it."

"I should like to see Queensland and the new farm again before I die, and to see what Jim has made of it," said Rick thoughtfully; "else I don't think it much matters whether I'm in jail or out of it. I suppose my work at Portland island will be out of doors, and that I shall have the open sky above my head, and feel the sea wind blowing over me. I don't care how hard the work may be, so long as it isn't inside four walls."

"But if ever you do get free, Rick, a few years ahead of us—"

"If ever I do, I'll sail straight away for Brisbane. I sha'n't come back to Kent, to be pointed at as the first that ever brought disgrace on the name of Redmayne."

"O, Rick, I don't believe there's a man among us who doesn't pity you," said the steward earnestly. "Sir Francis was one of those that tried hardest to get the sentence commuted. Lady Clevedon—well, there—the tears were in her eyes when she talked to me about you."

"Tender-hearted soul," murmured Richard gently. "I was sorry for her when I thought I'd killed her husband; but I can't for the life of me get to feel friendly towards him, though I know he's never done me any harm, and has even stood my friend since my trial. He's too much like that other. God, God! I couldn't have believed such a likeness was possible between men who were nothing to each other!"

"The likeness was strong, certainly, but hardly so close as you think. You only saw Harcross in the moonlight; if you'd seen both men by broad day, you'd have seen plenty of difference between them. The strangest thing was the accidental likeness in that miniature, an accident that might have cost Sir Francis his life. But they were like each other, there's no denying that, only the resemblance may not be quite so strange as you think."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Come, Rick, I believe you're to be trusted—not a man to blab everything you know, or to talk where talking would be a breach of honour—so I'll tell you a secret. Those two were something more than casual acquaintance, though Sir Francis doesn't know it, and is never likely to know it. They were half-brothers!"

"What?"

"Half-brothers. Ten years before Sir Lucas Clevedon married Miss Agnes Wilder, he ran away with an actress, a pretty woman, and a woman who was, for a few seasons, the rage up in London. She went by the name of Mrs. Mostyn, but whether she had a husband, living or dead, is more than I know; and whether Sir Lucas ever married her is more than I know. But my belief is that he did; for just before she died he sold an estate that his mother had left him, and settled every sixpence of the purchase-money in trust for the benefit of the son that had been born somewhere in Italy. Lord Dartmoor was one of the trustees, and I was the other, and it was Lord Dartmoor made him do it, as I heard drop from him in the course of the business. It was a good lump of money that he parted with this way, and I knew Sir Lucas well enough to know that he wouldn't have sacrificed as much as a twentieth part of the sum for any generous or manly consideration—in plain words, not unless he was obliged. So I have always suspected there was some kind of marriage—if not strictly legal, still strong enough to frighten Sir Lucas—and that the poor lady was persuaded to sell her son's birthright for this settlement. Sir Lucas had just come home from the Continent, and was paying his court to another lady at the time, the only daughter and heiress of a great banker, a young lady who afterwards married a nobleman. That courtship never came to anything. Sir Lucas was going down hill by this time, and his character had got to be pretty well known; so the young lady's father shut the door in his face, and he came down to Clevedon, and shut himself up and sulked like a wounded wild beast. As to his son, I don't believe he ever took the trouble to see him after he left him somewhere in foreign parts, with the poor mother. If anything was wanted to be done, I did it; and when Lord Dartmoor died, I had the whole management of the

boy's business till he came of age, when my trusteeship expired. We gave him a first-rate education—there was just enough income to do that liberally, and leave a small margin for accumulation. He was a clever, steady-going lad, and seemed to do well wherever he went. As a young man he was free from all his father's vices. I had as much trust and confidence in him as I might have had in my own son, or I should never have brought him across your threshold. You'll believe that of me, won't you, Richard Redmayne? I should never have brought him to Brierwood, if I hadn't thought him an honest man."

"Ay, ay," said Rick gloomily, "you trusted him, I daresay; but the wrong was done for all that. A stranger was brought into my house while I was away, a stranger who broke my daughter's heart."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"AND WHEN HE FALLS, HE FALLS LIKE LUCIFER."

MRS. HARCROSS read Richard Redmayne's story in the *Times* read it with dry eyes, but a bitter and passionate heart. . So she had been the dupe, after all; and all that remorse for her own shortcomings, all that sad yearning for the days of her married life to come back again, that she might be a better wife to the husband of her love—all these pangs of conscience were wasted agony. He had never loved her; his false heart had been given to this country girl; his moody hours of thought and silence had been a tribute to that dead love. He had given to her, his legitimate wife, only the unreal image and semblance of affection, while tender memories and remorseful thoughts were lavished on that lost idol.

In the light of this discovery she remembered a hundred petty details of the life that was ended: the merest trifles in themselves, but indicating so much now that she possessed the key to their meaning. She remembered how much more prone he had been to fits of absence and gloom after that summer holiday in Kent than he had ever been before—a change which she had ascribed to altered health, and about which, in the proud security that a well-developed organ of self-esteem gives its possessor, she had troubled herself very little. She drained her cup of bitterness to the dregs, and even went down to Brierwood to see the place where her lover had learned to be false to her. Mrs. Bush was still in charge of the homestead, and quite ready to tell the strange lady all she knew, even without the bribe of a sovereign which Mrs. Harcross gave her. Augusta saw the low old-fashioned rooms; the garden, where a few pale monthly roses were still blooming with a faint perfume that

seemed like a memory of vanished sweets. Mrs. Bush pointed out the cedar "under which Mr. Redmayne and his family was so fond of sittin'—Miss Grace, and her aunt and uncle, and all—of a Sunday evenin'." How common it all sounded! And it was for a girl with such surroundings as these that he had been shamefully false to her! For this poor cottage heroine he had forfeited his life!

There was a photograph of Grace still hanging over the chimney-piece in Richard's room—a poor faint shadow of the sweet changeful face. What, was it for this insignificant countenance he had betrayed her? She questioned Mrs. Bush closely about the dead girl. Was she prettier than that picture—much prettier? Mrs. Bush replied that she was "pleasing," and could not be induced to venture beyond that cautious epithet. Augusta asked permission to walk round the garden once more, by herself; and having obtained it, went slowly along the path where Hubert and Grace had lingered quoting *Romeo and Juliet* in the summer night; looked drearily into the orchard where they had sat on sultry afternoons, she with some never-to-be-finished needlework in her lap, he reading and expounding Shelley's *Epipsychidion*, and thinking how sweet it would be to spend the rest of his days in a garden or an orchard at Grace Redmayne's feet. Augusta gazed upon this humble scene with tired aching eyes, marvelling strangely, in the midst of her despair, how he, to whom all the glories of the Acropolis-square district were open, could have endured existence in such a scene as this, even for a week. And then she went back to the fly that had brought her from the station, and made her dismal journey home, there to seclude herself from all companionship, and brood upon this new trouble.

It was a cruel blow, a most humiliating revelation; for she had loved the traitor, still loved him, holding his memory dearer than any earthly affection. Still more bitter even than the first shock of the discovery was Weston Vallory's visit of condolence, with the *Times* newspaper in his pocket, and a smug smile of satisfaction lurking at the corners of his cunning mouth.

"It is the fate of noble natures to be deceived, my dear Augusta," he said with a sympathetic air. "Suffering such as you are called upon to endure is a heritage of sorrow which but too often accompanies nobility of heart."

Mrs. Harcross was the last of women to brook any sentimental impertinence of this kind. All the cousinship in the world could not, in her eyes, justify such violation of her sacred grief.

"Who taught you to gauge my sorrow?" she cried with passionate disdain; "or to measure *his* sins with your petty plumb-line? At his worst he was better and nobler than you ever were or can be. Stick to your office desk, and your copying

machine, and your gutta-percha speaking-tubes, Weston, if you please, and do not presume to talk of my troubles."

This was rather a knock-down blow for Weston Vallory, who had fancied the course very smooth and straight before him now that Providence in its wisdom had removed that stumbling-block, Hubert Harcross.

He left his cousin's presence crestfallen, but not despairing. Augusta's words and manner had been contemptuous to an unbearable degree; but then a woman in a passion will say anything; and he had perhaps been somewhat premature in his offers of sympathy. The aspect of things would be different by-and-by, no doubt. He would resent this outrage by a lofty silence, and a dignified withdrawal of his presence; he would hold himself aloof from Augusta for some time to come, until that foolish infatuated woman should discover that the man who had always been useful had perforce of habit become necessary.

He went back to his office desk, as his cousin had bidden him, and worked on steadily, adding brick to brick in that vast edifice the firm of Harcross and Vallory, and looking forward with a hopeful patience to that future day in which Augusta and her fortune should be his, and when the butler and his satellites, and all the household in Mastodon-crescent, should bow down before him, and own him for their master. With such a house and such a wife, supported and sustained by the business in Old Jewry, which must eventually become all his own, what more of earth's splendours or fame's laurels could he desire? He would not have exchanged such a lot for the might of Croesus, or Darius, or Alexander, or Hannibal, or Polycrates, or any of those classical "parties," whose works had made the burden of his school-days, who abode in hourly dread of unpleasant oracles, and altogether appeared to be more subject to the fluctuation of fortune, and the malice of the god's, than any modern adventurer.

So Mr. Vallory junior held his soul in patience, and his faith was strong in time; whereby it was something of a shock to him to learn one fine morning from his uncle that Augusta was going to sell off the splendid goods and chattels in Mastodon-crescent, and to travel on the Continent for a year or so with her father.

"You can get on very well without me here, Weston," Mr. Vallory observed graciously; "and I really feel it my duty to look after Augusta. This business has been an awful blow. I think she felt that horrid story of Harcross's past life, which came out during that scoundrel Redmayne's trial, almost more than her husband's death, although she has never admitted as much to me. I am very glad to take her abroad; change of scene and all that sort of thing may do wonders, you know. And I'm very glad she has decided upon selling the lease and furniture

on Mastodon-crescent; she'll get rid of all melancholy associations, you see."

"And sacrifice no end of money," said Weston, with a lugubrious look. "She'll realize about as many hundreds as she spent thousands. I have no doubt there's a good deal of consolation in that to any thing as inconsistent and unreasonable as a woman."

"In her present state of mind money is hardly a consideration, Weston," replied Mr. Vallory, in his pompous way. "When my daughter returns to England she will reside with me. I have felt my house no home without her. Even my cook has fallen off; I rarely get my favourite curries, or the only soup I really care for. Not that Augusta ever interfered about such trifles; but there was an influence, you know—an influence."

So Mrs. Harcross departed, and wintered at Rome, whither carriages and horses, and all the paraphernalia of Acropolis-square existence, went with her; where she drove daily upon the Corso with her father, gloomily handsome in her widow's weeds, leaning back listlessly in her open carriage, with eyes that seemed to see neither landscape nor people. She stayed here till the end of March, and spent the summer in pottering about from one German bath to another, in quest of the magical elixir which was to cure her father's gout. They spent the following winter in Paris, where Mr. Vallory hired a luxurious first floor in the Rue César-Auguste, and the Acropolis-square mansion still languished in brown holland and darkness. The irrepressible Weston employed a good deal of his leisure during this winter, which was unusually severe, in crossing and recrossing the Channel. The mail-boat that carried this modern Cæsar and his fortunes ran foul of a French steamer one blustering midnight, whereby Weston narrowly escaped drowning; but still he held on, dauntless and unflagging as a Queen's Messenger, that hapless slave of State, whose perils about equal those of a famous warrior, and who is, under the cheeseparing system of our present administration, paid very little better than a butler. He presented himself every now and then in the drawing-room in the Rue César-Auguste to do homage to his cousin Augusta, half an hour before dinner, white-cravated and spotless, with no odour of steamboat or railway clinging to his garments. He had his pet chamber, No. 333 bis, at Meurice's, and rarely found it occupied when he required it. By this unflinching attention—by solicitude that knew no weariness—he did at last contrive to slip back into his old position of usefulness; fetched and carried music and books, and patterns and threads for point lace-work; and felt that he was gaining ground. The star of hope began to shine for him again. The days went on—Mr. Vallory and his daughter came back to England. The Ryde villa and the yacht

had been sold, at Augusta's request; were they not bitter to her soul, being so closely associated with the days of her courtship and married life? So Mr. Vallory bought an estate in Warwickshire, seven hundred acres or so, with a huge stucco-fronted mansion, called Copplestoke Manor, a few miles from Leamington, and began a new phase of existence as a country gentleman; taking the chair at vestry meetings, and sitting on the bench at petty sessions, and vexing the souls of rural legislators with the abstrusest technicalities of the law.

Hither, too, came Weston Vallory, always eager to be useful; but although Mrs. Harcross tolerated him graciously enough in his capacity of light porter, for him there was no riding by her side in hawthorn alleys, or loitering under star-proof elms in the summer night; or drifting gently on the narrow winding river, with a lazy dip of the oars now and then, and an occasional entanglement among green masses of mazy weed. He felt himself a guest on sufferance, and there were times when the star of hope grew dim.

Mrs. Harcross had been three years a widow, but still wore mourning—resolutely refusing Madame Bouffante the privilege of making her any dress which was not of the black silk and bugly order—when the star of hope sank altogether in the blackest darkness. Weston had been unusually busy in Old Jewry during the winter term, and had not seen his cousin, either in London or at Copplestoke Manor, for nearly three months, when he came down to the country house for a brief visit.

He arrived at dusk, after a snow-storm, when the drive from the lodge to the house was like a journey through fairyland, although the idea did not occur to Weston, who like the famous French Blue-stocking, abhorred the beauties of nature. He fancied the house had a more festive appearance than usual, even while he lingered for a few minutes in the hall, giving directions about some packages he had brought for Augusta. There were more hot-house flowers, brighter fires, more lights; the servants had a busier, gayer air, for the mansion had been a somewhat sepulchral abode, despite its grandeur, hitherto.

"Has my uncle many visitors?" he asked the butler carelessly.

"No, sir; not many, sir. Lord Stanmore and Edgware is staying with us, sir, and Captain Purfleet; nobody else."

"Stanmore and Edgware! A new acquaintance," thought Weston, whose only knowledge of that nobleman was obtained from the *Peerage* and the *Morning Post*. He had an idea that Stanmore and Edgware was elderly, and had never done anything to add lustre to his title, except condescend to exist. "Humph!" he said, not displeased to find that he was to hob-and-nob with a peer, not a horse-racing or insolvent nobleman,

but a respectable landowner. "Lord Stanmore has a place near here, I suppose?"

"No, sir; his lordship's estates are in the North, sir. His lordship was stoppin' at Lord Leigh's for the 'untin', before Christmas, and his lordship has been here hever sence." The butler gave a faint cough, not without some kind of significance, which puzzled Weston a little. But of course it was only the man's elation at having ministered so long to the peerage.

Weston went up-stairs to dress, and arrayed himself with a little more care than usual: put on his favourite boots, and a shirt with Valenciennes medallions which he deemed invincible; his studs were black enamel skulls with diamond eyes; the parting of his hair was perfection. Never had he felt better satisfied with himself, with his arched instep, his moustache, with all his small graces, than as he went down the wide oak staircase, where unwonted parterres of scented geranium and stephanotis regaled his nostrils as he went.

"Tommy loves a lord," he said to himself with a cynical grin. "I suppose my poor uncle is not exempt from that pardonable weakness of humanity."

There were only three persons in the drawing-room when he entered—his uncle, Augusta, and a tall bald-headed man with grey moustachios, who stood with his back to the fireplace. Mrs. Harcross was seated in a low chair opposite the fire, holding a spangled fan between her face and the blaze of the logs piled on the wide old-fashioned hearth. She wore crimson camellias in her hair and in the bosom of her gauzy black dress, the first gleam of colour that Weston had ever seen her wear since her husband's death; and the gentleman with the gray mustachios was bending down to speak to her, with such an air of chivalrous devotion as may have distinguished King Arthur in the days when Guinevere was true, and the serpent had not yet entered the sacred circle of the king's chosen knights.

The attitude, the look, the tone, revealed all to Weston Vallory's rapid comprehension. The star of hope shot downward to abysses unfathomable, never to rise again. Before he went to his comfortable bachelor bedroom in the western wing, he had learnt the worst. His uncle told him everything over a bottle of claret, when the Earl and his satellite Captain Purfleet had left the dining-room, only lingering a few minutes after Augusta's departure.

"It was not a thing I cared to write about," said Mr. Vallory. "They have only been engaged three weeks; but from the day we first met Lord Stanmore at a hunting breakfast at Stoneleigh, the business was settled. It was a 'case,' as you fast young men say. Augusta was very much disinclined to hear of such a thing; but I felt that in an affair of this kind her opposi-

tion must be borne down—an estate like Stanmore and Edgware, improving in value every year, miles of building frontages on the outskirts of the most populous towns in the North, coal mines, slate quarries, and a man of blameless character,—thirty years or so her senior, I grant: but we know by the experience of mankind that these marriages, founded on a mutual esteem, and—aw, hum—the desire to consolidate a vast estate, are often the happiest.”

“Yes,” cried Weston, breaking in with a bitter laugh; “but if she had fallen in love with some *poor* devil of the same age, I wonder what you’d have called it? A vicious infatuation, which argues—the sort of thing which Iago says of Desdemona, you know; but of course, as he’s an earl and the estate is all right, it’s quite another matter.”

“I don’t think that’s a very genial way of receiving my communication, Weston; I thought you’d be naturally delighted. The match is really a brilliant one, the sort of marriage I always dreamed of for my daughter, before her unfortunate alliance with poor Harcross. And even you will profit by it; your status will be not a little improved when you can claim cousinship with a countess. That sort of thing ought to be worth a thousand a year to a man in your position; to say nothing of the probability that you may get the Stanmore land agency before long, and no end of leases and deeds of agreement.”

“I ought to be amazingly grateful, I daresay,” replied Weston, “but the news is rather startling. I thought my cousin was a model widow, wedded to the dead.”

“Weston,” exclaimed Mr. Vallory, with severity, “I believe you’re a radical!”

So Augusta Harcross, in due time and with no unseemly haste, was translated into a loftier sphere, in which she knew not Weston, or only remembered him faintly at half-yearly intervals, when she permitted his name to be inscribed by some menial hand on one of her invitation cards.

Her husband’s private secretary attended to these minor details. He had a book given him, upon whose right-hand pages were inscribed the sheep, or exalted personages, who must be invited to all large assemblies, and upon whose left-hand appeared the obscure herd of goats, who were to be bidden once or so in a season, if convenient.

Augusta had prime ministers and royal dukes to dine with her in these latter days, and Weston attended receptions so crowded that he was fain to depart without having so much as caught a “little look across the crowd” from his hostess and kinswoman. But he did in some wise console himself with the idea that he gained in social distinction by his cousin’s advance-

ment, and he received numerous applications from acquaintances of his own who wanted to obtain Lady Stanmore's influence for this or for that. It was a meagre consolation, but it was something. He had his dainty little villa at Norwood, his well-groomed horses, roses that were never permitted to suffer from the green fly, and he had all the keen delights of an ever-increasing business in Old Jewry.

For some favoured creatures life seems all sunshine. No shadow has darkened Clevedon Hall since the horror of Hubert Harcross's murder, and some new joys have come to brighten that pleasant home. Little voices sound gaily and little feet patter swiftly in the corridors of Clevedon to-day, and in these latter years there are larger butterflies than "Greeks" or "Trojans," "Camberwell beauties," "Peacocks' eyes," or "Painted ladies" to be seen hovering about the flower-beds in the old-fashioned gardens. Sibyl Clevedon has become Sibyl Hardwood, and brings her babies from Tunbridge Wells every other day to compare Tottie's new tooth with her cousin Lottie's, or to inquire if Migsy's symptoms in the opening stage of measles are as satisfactory as those exhibited by Popsy in the same disease. Happy English households, about which there is so little to tell! The Colonel exists in a seventh heaven of grand-paternal rapture, which verges on senility. The Bungalow brims over with babies—for are not Sibyl's children a kind of left-handed grandchildren of his?—and the quadruped favourites during these irruptions of the juvenile population feel themselves more or less at a disadvantage. Pedro snaps or spits his displeasure; the dogs retire under low chairs to growl at the invader; the mongoose disappears from human ken, to be found perhaps at nightfall, by some frightened housemaid, snugly coiled under the Colonel's duvet. The Colonel stuffs the little ones with currie-bât, and Bombay ducks, which provoke unwonted thirst in these small epicures, and dried fruits from Afghanistan, and West Indian preserved ginger, and ministers to their little appetites with all the art he knows; for which reason lengthened visits to the Bungalow are apt to result in bilious attacks and the exhibition of doctor's stuff.

Brierwood, forfeited for ever by Richard Redmayne's crime, has passed into the hands of the stranger. The deed of gift by which he bestowed Bulrush Meads upon his brother James has preserved the Gipp'sland farm from the grasp of the law; but the gray old Kentish homestead, with the red-tiled roof that shone out warmly from the green background of an English landscape, has gone from the house of Redmayne for ever.*

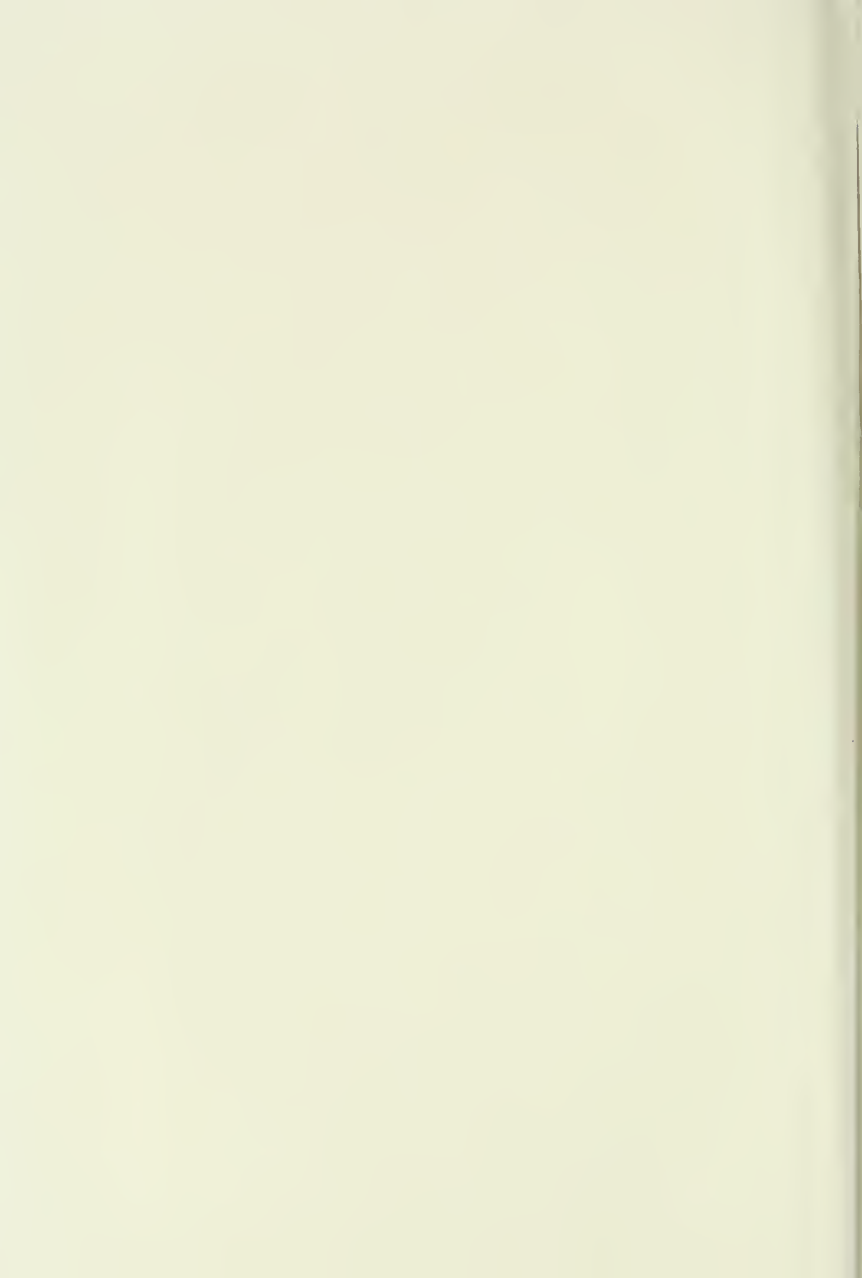
* The law is now more merciful: the property of a felon is no longer forfeited to the crown.

The day will come perhaps, distant yet, but dimly possible in the future, when Rick Redmaynes's bonds may be loosened; when, as a reward for unflinching toil and unvarying good conduct, the quiet submission of a repentant sinner, who feels that his burden can never be too heavy for the measure of his offences, he may go forth from the drear monotony of that prison island, an old man, with grizzled hair, and rugged deep-lined countenance, a man whose shoulders are bent with long labour, go forth, free at the last, to that fairer, wider world for which his soul longs. Not to Brierwood, the lost home of sad memories, the house haunted by his dead daughter's ghost, the place whose gloomy influence well-nigh drove him mad; but to the fertile plains and inland seas of Gippsland, to the mountains and the watersheds where tall gum-trees shoot upward under the cloudless blue sky, where the ringing note of the bell-bird sounds keen and clear in the tranquil distance.

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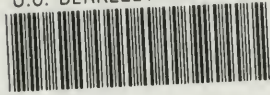
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